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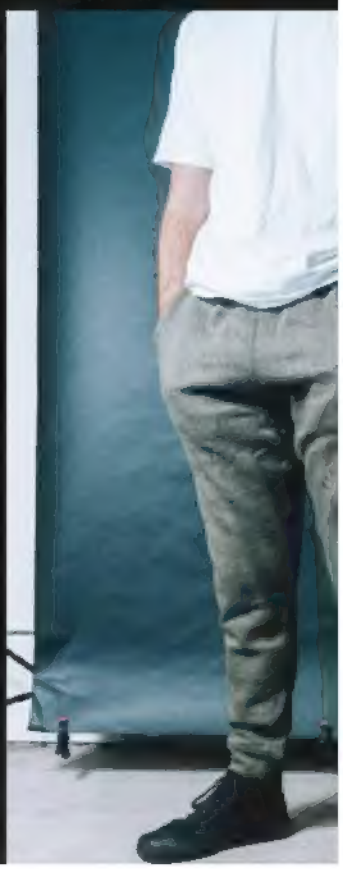

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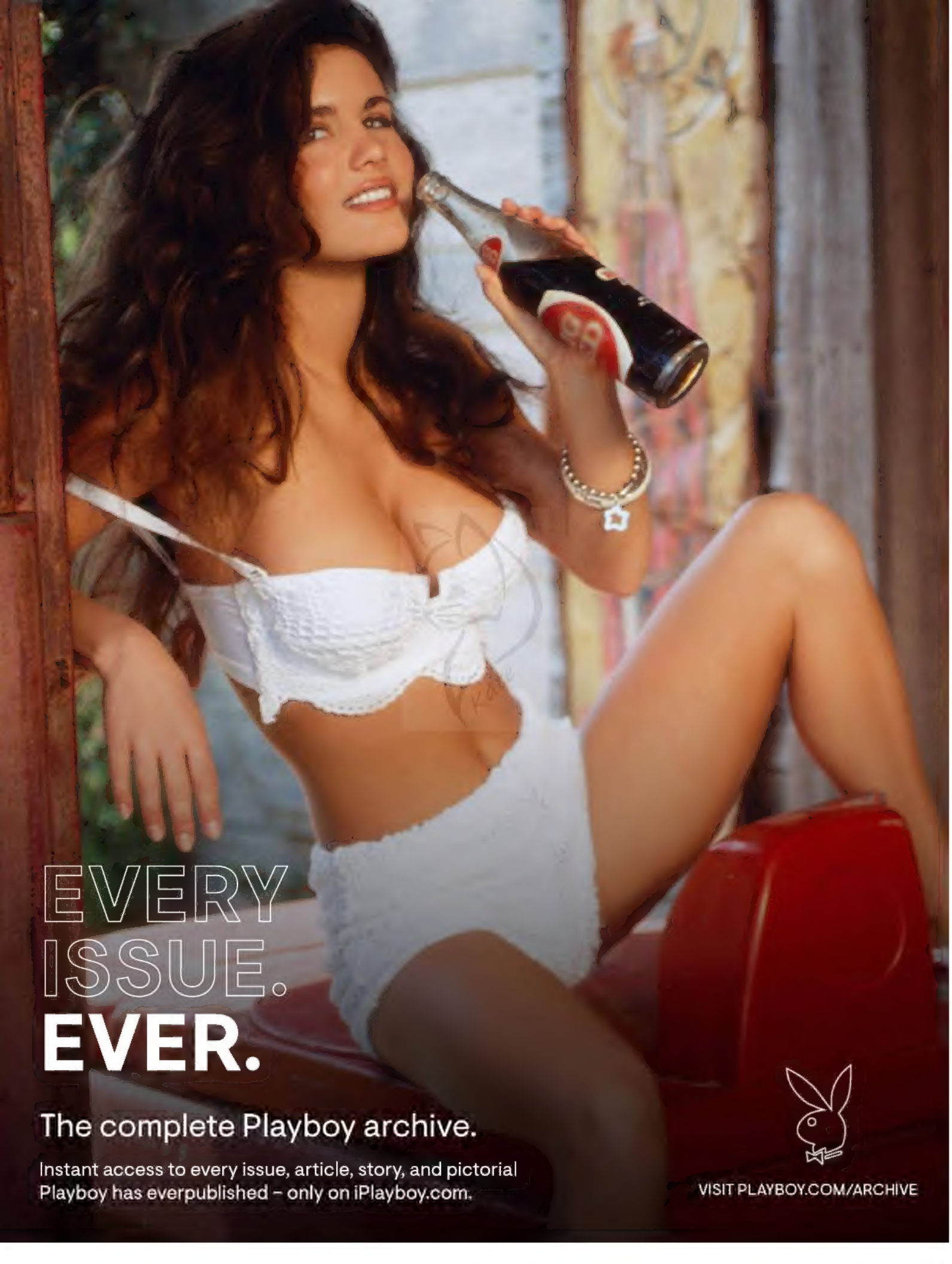
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Graphic Designer **Koketso Moganetsi**

Fashion Editor **Lexie Robb**

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Tech Editor **Peter Wolff**

Illustrations **Toon53 Productions**

Motoring Editor **John Page**

Senior Photo Editor **Luba V Nel**

ADVERTISING SALES **pieter@dhsmedia.co.za**

for more information

PHONE: +27 10 006 0051
MAIL: PO Box 71450, Bryanston, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2021
ADDRESS: First Floor Block 6 Fourways Office Park, Cnr Roos Street & Fourways Boulevard, 2191
EMAIL: info@dhsmedia.co.za
WEB: www.playboy.co.za
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/PlayBAfrica
INSTAGRAM: playboymag_africa

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Hugh M. Hefner, FOUNDER

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CONTENTS

06 Berries, birds and internet trolls: the final chapter of Lapinot

08 Inside the kinky world of sexual knife play

12 PICTORIAL
RACHEL ASHLEY JOHNSON

20 King Noire on pain, pleasure and black love

22 Outta This World, another awesome DMC comic

30 Perc Love on opioids, Instagram and two star-crossed lovers

42 COVER
OLYRIA ROY

50 Jamming with Jay-Z, rap's leading man on all his big moments!

64 PICTORIAL
JADE MARRIOTT

72 Martin Luther King Jr.: A testament of hope

86 PICTORIAL
MAZIN

94 The officer or instigator? Exploring the social question

ON THE COVER
OLYRIA ROY
Photography by Amer Mohamad
No 43 | **February 2021**

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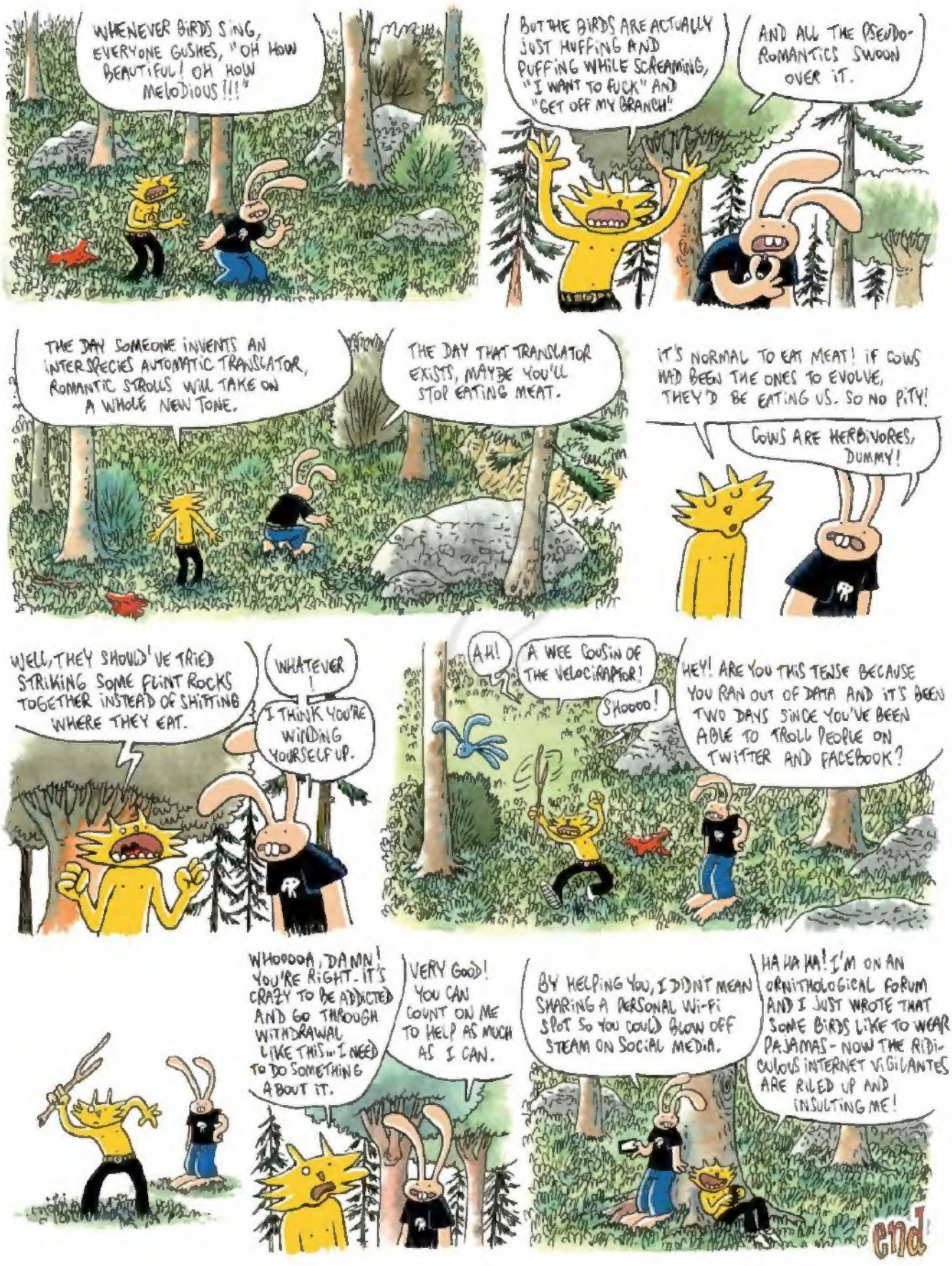
Blueberry Blues

A PASTORAL ADVENTURE OF LAPINOT AND RICHARD BY LEWIS TROONDYR

THE GENERAL IDEA IN LIFE IS TO LEAVE SOME FOR OTHERS.
WELL, IF NO ONE ELSE COMES HERE, THE BERRIES WILL GO TO WASTE, SO WE MAY AS WELL STUFF OURSELVES AND BRING THE REST HOME.
BIRDS WILL EAT SOME...
NO, NO... I'M NOT LEAVING ANYTHING FOR THE DINOSAUR DESCENDENTS.
HUMANS INVENTED FOOSBALL IN UNDER 2 MILLIONS YEARS, BUT DINOSAURS, WITH 165 MILLION YEARS TO EVOLVE, HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING.

PIGEONS AND CHICKENS!
THIS IS WHAT THEY'VE BECOME.
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT... YOU CLEARLY DON'T LIKE BIRDS...
CAN'T WE JUST ENJOY THE MOMENT?
BUT I'M NOT DONE!


WHENEVER BIRDS SING, EVERYONE GUSHES, "OH HOW BEAUTIFUL! OH HOW MELODIOUS!!!"
BUT THE BIRDS ARE ACTUALLY JUST HUFFING AND PUFFING WHILE SCREAMING, "I WANT TO FUCK" AND "GET OFF MY BRANCH!"
AND ALL THE PSEUDO-ROMANTICS SWOON OVER IT.
THE DAY SOMEONE INVENTS AN INTERSPECIES AUTOMATIC TRANSLATOR, ROMANTIC STROLLS WILL TAKE ON A WHOLE NEW TONE.
THE DAY THAT TRANSLATOR EXISTS, MAYBE YOU'LL STOP EATING MEAT.
IT'S NORMAL TO EAT MEAT! IF COWS HAD BEEN THE ONES TO EVOLVE, THEY'D BE EATING US. SO NO PITY!
COWS ARE HERBIVORES, DUMMY!
WELL, THEY SHOULD'VE TRIED STRIKING SOME FLINT ROCKS TOGETHER INSTEAD OF SHITTING WHERE THEY EAT.
WHATEVER
I THINK YOU'RE WINDING YOURSELF UP.
AH!
A WEE COUSIN OF THE VELOCIRAPTOR!
SHOOOO!
HEY! ARE YOU THIS TENSE BECAUSE YOU RAN OUT OF DATA AND IT'S BEEN TWO DAYS SINCE YOU'VE BEEN ABLE TO TROLL PEOPLE ON TWITTER AND FACEBOOK?
WHOOOOA, DAMN! YOU'RE RIGHT. IT'S CRAZY TO BE ADDICTED AND GO THROUGH WITHDRAWAL LIKE THIS... I NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.
VERY GOOD! YOU CAN COUNT ON ME TO HELP AS MUCH AS I CAN.
BY HELPING YOU, I DIDN'T MEAN SHARING A PERSONAL WI-FI SPOT SO YOU COULD BLOW OFF STEAM ON SOCIAL MEDIA.
HA HA HA! I'M ON AN ORNITHOLOGICAL FORUM AND I JUST WROTE THAT SOME BIRDS LIKE TO WEAR PAJAMAS - NOW THE RIDICULOUS INTERNET VIGILANTES ARE RILED UP AND INSULTING ME!
end

The Kinky World of Knife Play

We've all heard of "death by a thousand cuts," but what about orgasm by thousand cuts?

BY SOPHIE SAINT THOMAS

Could sex be the enemy of death? If we're talking in a cis heteronormative context, this theory could apply to literal reproduction. In a pleasure-oriented context, sex makes us feel alive and allows us to become our most primal selves, defying death through the merging of bodies and orgasmic high. But what happens when the great kinksters of the world add the threat of death to sex? It's time to up the ante. We're talking about going all the way, which, for some people, is knife sex. Or, as the beautifully perverse minds who enjoy such erotic stimulation call it, knife play.

"I was first introduced to hematolagnia [blood fetish] when I was around 18," says U.K.-based sex educator and pro domme Lady Ness. "It started off in the form of vampire fetishism, where I explored neck and thigh biting that drew blood."

"It quickly became clear that I preferred giving rather than receiving," Ness says. "The vampiric element hasn't stuck around eternally, but exploring blood and knife play has. It feels edgy and sets me into a mindset that combines extreme lust and deep concentration, due to having to be aware of safety and your play partner's reactions."

Making it to home base doesn't mean penis in the vagina; that's as straight and vanilla as a diner milkshake. For knife play practitioners, it means breaking out the knives. But while Ness may enjoy drawing blood, piercing the skin is not the sole goal of the kink.

"Knife play tends to be more fear-based, so it's more of a psychological type of arousal," says psychotherapist and sex therapist Dulcinea Pitagora. "It's about power dynamics because the knife top is literally wielding power over the knife bottom." (Dibs on Knife Top as a band name.)

Think of engaging in knife play like having an edible: You want to start low and go slow. First, try integrating blades into your dirty talk. The submissive may whisper, "Daddy, hold a knife against my throat while you fuck me." If you want to take it further, obtain a very dull blade, which the dominant partner can hold or "threaten" the submissive with during sex. The visual of pointing a blade at someone or looking up to see the point of a knife coming down at you is so exhilarating that no bloodletting is necessary.

Knife play is an example of edge play, which does not refer to the edge of a blade but is an umbrella term for kinky activity that pushes the envelope of what is considered safe, sane and consensual. S.S.C. is an acronym used by the kink community, but one person's edge play is another person's casual Tuesday night.

"What's edgy for one person might not be edgy for another person," Pitagora says. "It's the riskier behaviors—anything that involves potential bodily fluids or breaking skin—that pushes someone's edge. You may think of edge play as deliberately pushing someone's boundaries, but what that is depends on the person. Everybody's boundaries are different."

For some, the visual of a knife may be more than enough. Often kink or sex clubs, such as New York City's NSFW, will incorporate knife play into performances for members to watch. A dominatrix dressed as a nun may run a knife down her submissive's body or use it to carefully scrape off candle wax. "It can be done in a fun way where it doesn't have to be about cutting, it doesn't have to be about bloodletting—it can be about intimidation," says NSFW founder and chief conspirator Daniel Saynt. For such moments, the audience is always on their toes, holding their breath and boners while a glistening knife glides gently over a breast.

But let's set the record straight: Sometimes knife play is gentle and performative; other times it is exactly what you imagine.

"I used a razor blade to cut his back and chest while we fucked, and let his blood run onto me," says Carrie*, a 50-year-old woman from Texas, about knife sex with her ex. "I'd lick it off him and paint us with it. As it dried, we'd stick together. Over the days afterward, I'd see the cuts healing. Once he was healed enough, we'd do it again. He kept it to areas that would be covered by a shirt."

At the risk of stating the obvious, cutting someone is not exactly the pillar of safe sex. But before you judge the edgy kinksters of the underworld, consider that you may have engaged in blood play without even knowing it.

"Let's say they're having mainstream sex and somebody is digging their fingernails or scratching someone's back," Pitagora says. "Somebody might bleed. I've heard people think it's cute or funny, but it's kind of a similar thing. Except for knife play, I would say people tend to talk more."

The world of BDSM, like so many subcultures, has learned to take care of itself. Kinksters know the stakes are higher, which means constant communication, setting boundaries, establishing safe words, rehearsing scenes and even learning medical skills.

"If your intention is to draw blood, then you should do it in a location that's safe," Pitagora says. "You should not do it near a major artery or where there are veins you could cut."

And don't forget to leave out cookies. "Other essentials are gloves and sterile medical equipment—and cookies and ice cream," says Lady Ness. "Because these acts can trigger the sympathetic nervous system, blood-sugar levels can drop, so having something sugary on hand is important. I also have an emergency foil blanket, as some subs' temperatures can drop."

"IT CAN BE DONE IN A FUN WAY WHERE IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE ABOUT CUTTING, IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE ABOUT BLOODLETTING—IT CAN BE ABOUT INTIMIDATION."

Knife play isn't casual, even if it's not as scary as you may think. The intensity doesn't have to be written in blood but can be expressed through a human bond. You should only engage in edge play with someone you know and trust, not for monogamy reasons but because you want to communicate and prepare without fear. It's not cool to slit and split; knife play requires aftercare, a kinky term for taking care of one another after a scene.

"Aftercare is whatever brings the power exchange from the scene back to equilibrium," Pitagora says. "For some people, it's having vanilla sex. It's the palate cleanser that takes you to a better place. There's a release of tension because once you do a risky scene with someone and it goes well then it can bring people together to feel emotionally bonded."

Adding knives, which are typically associated with violence, into sex, a beautiful and messy act of violence, can not only make you feel alive but closer with your partner than ever before. "I think part of the appeal is the power aspect—that I had the power to potentially really hurt him," Carrie says of knife sex with her ex.

With edge play, you don't need to leave a scar, even if [illegible] are involved, to stay alive in a former lover's mind.

"Blood has always fascinated me. The smell, the [illegible], it dries and changes color and texture. Having someone share [illegible] with me was very intimate," Carrie says. "I've never felt a bond [illegible] that before. It was so powerful. I won't s[illegible] corny, but it was very special."

*Last name withheld for privacy purposes

ADDING KNIVES, WHICH ARE TYPICALLY ASSOCIATED WITH VIOLENCE, INTO SEX, A BEAUTIFUL AND MESSY ACT OF VIOLENCE, CAN NOT ONLY MAKE YOU FEEL ALIVE BUT CLOSER WITH YOUR PARTNER THAN EVER BEFORE.

RACHEL ASHL

LEY JOHNSON

Such an honour to have a gorgeous and talented beauty feature! We're curious to know how your journey has been as one of the most respected models in your industry.
Thank you so much I'm truly thr led to be pub ished in P ayboy for the tenth time. began mode ing professiona y after graduated co lege n the summer of 2018. My first pub icat on was P ayboy South Africa September 2018. I've been extens ve y published since began mode ing 've been pub ished in over 60 magaz ne features, 25 magazine covers, published in P ayboy 10 t mes, and P ayboy P aymate of the month P ayboy Austra ia August 2019

Given your obvious stunning good looks and striking features, tell us a bit about where you're from? was born and raised in beautiful Napa Va ey wine country I moved to LA to attend co ege.

Tell us something surprising about you? I danced bal et for ten years. danced with the Moscow Ballet Company in the Great Russian Nutcracker when I was 12

2020 was an incredibly challenging for all us, what would say has been the most challenging thing for you thus far?
The most chal enging aspect of 2020 wou d be trave ng espec a y trave ng internationa y which 'm not able to do due to trave restr ctions.

What are some of the things you like to do, behind the cameras and all the glitz and glamour? en oy posing, be ng creative, and creating beautifu art. Modeling is truly an art. U timate y I love being pub ished

If we were to try and sweep you right off your feet, what are some of the things you look for in an ideal partner? In a partner look for someone who is successfu , distinguished, enjoys trave ing, someone have an nte lectua connection with, and someone who makes mak ng me happy a priority

And what would make you go running in the opposite direction as fast as possible? I run as far as poss b e from men who are rude, aggressive, nconsistent, no manners, and that are not ambit ous.

You're a seemingly talented lady, what are some, if any, of your hidden talents not many people know about? 'm actua y an entrepreneur I'm current y working on aunching my own bikin' swimwear ine

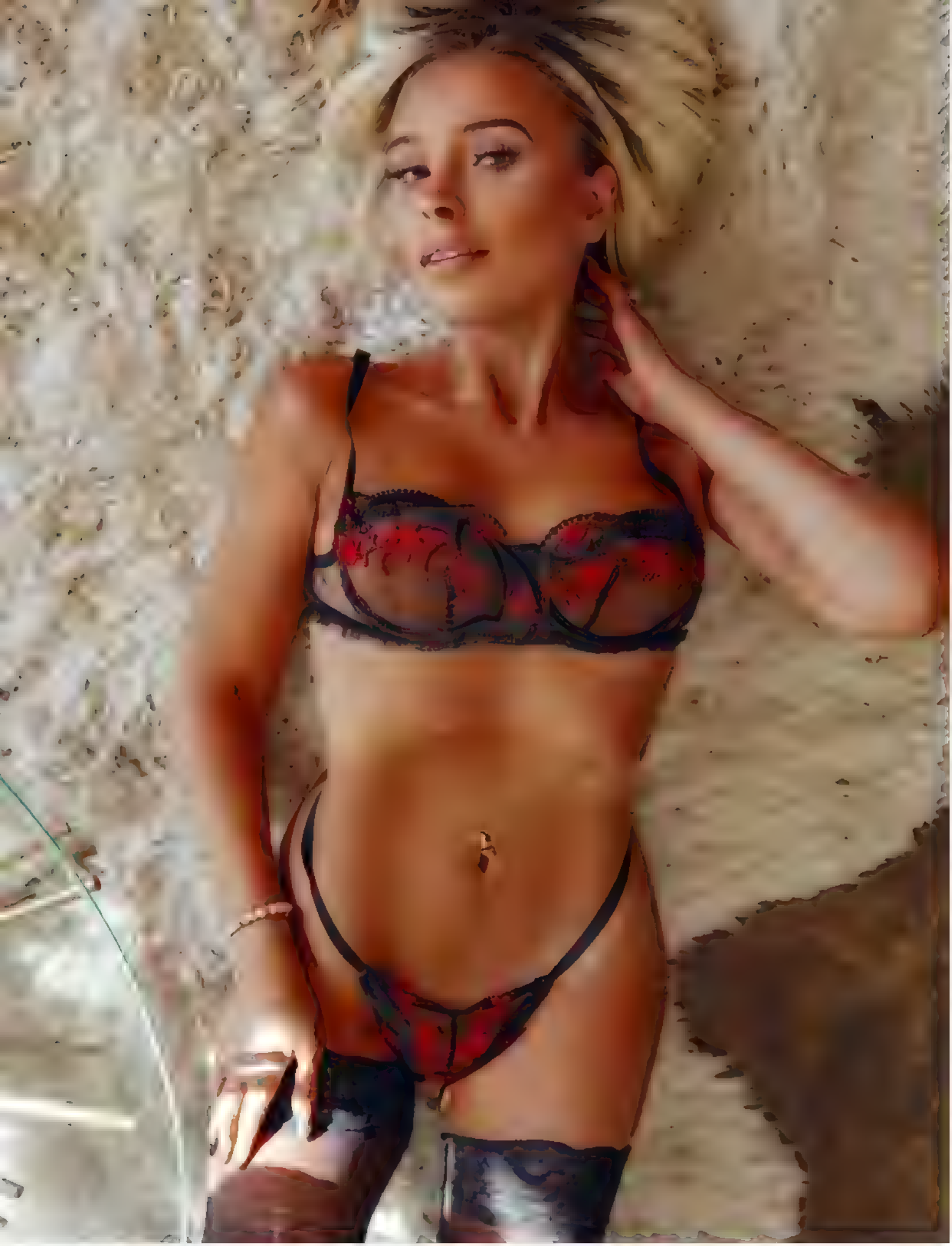
What makes you feel sexy? What makes me fee sexy is mode ing high end designer ingerie. ove uxury ngerie

If you could have any superpower in the world, what would it be and why? f could possess any superpower in the wor d it would be to time trave . 've a ways been fascinated with the idea of be ng ab e to trave to various time periods.

What can we expect from you this year? Any major plans and exciting things we can look forward to from you?
This year w I be pub ished, trave ing, and aunching my b kini swimwear line. You'l be able to watch me n the Internationa Bikini Model Search rea ity show which wi l stream on the Roku channe in the spring of 2021

n addition to mode ing I wi begin doing mansion tours and luxury real estate in Beverly Hi s later in 2021 once the pandemic ca ms down a bit

It has been a true pleasure getting to know you! Any final words for our readers out there? Thank you so much Playboy it was abso utely thri ng to be featured! Keep watch ng me create my dreams into reality



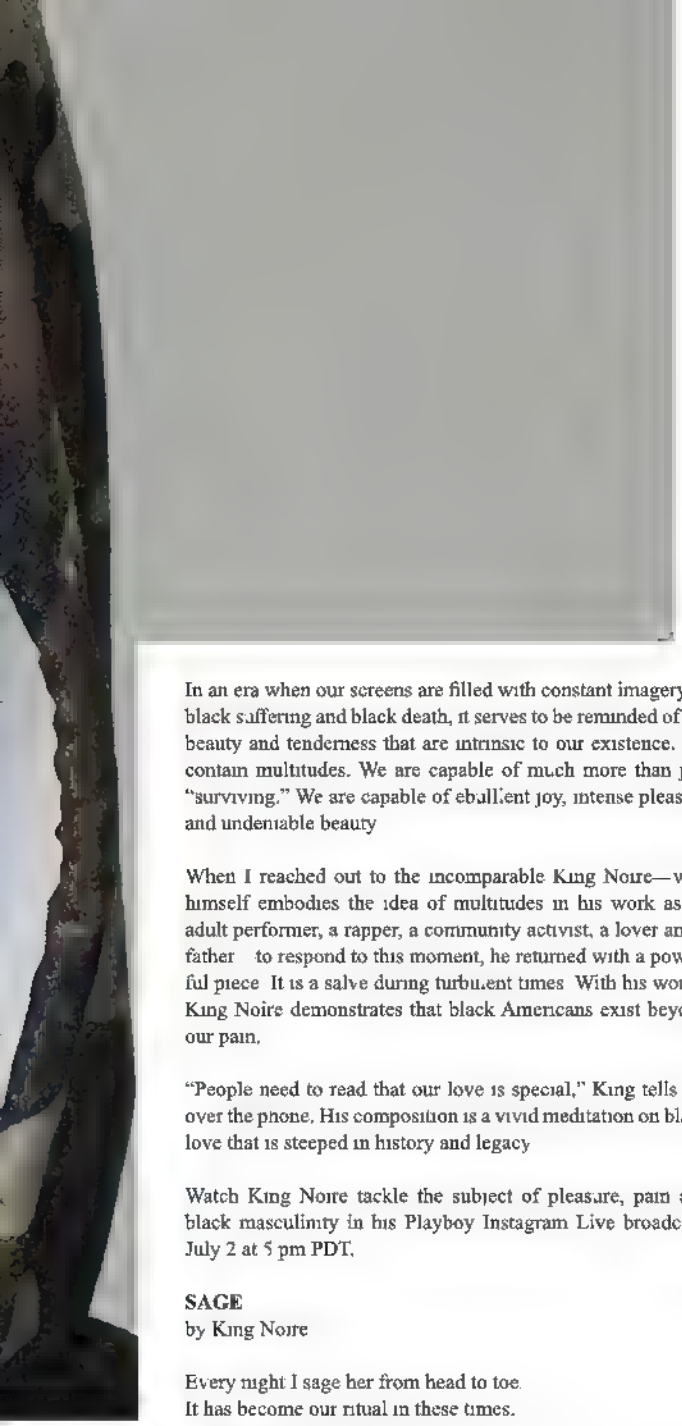
King Noire

on Pain, Pleasure and Black Love

The adult star and community activist wants people to know the Black community has more to offer than its pain.

WR TTEN BY **KING NOIRE**

NTRODUCT ON BY **ANITA LITTLE**



In an era when our screens are filled with constant imagery of black suffering and black death, it serves to be reminded of the beauty and tenderness that are intrinsic to our existence. We contain multitudes. We are capable of much more than just "surviving." We are capable of ebullient joy, intense pleasure and undeniable beauty

When I reached out to the incomparable King Noire—who himself embodies the idea of multitudes in his work as an adult performer, a rapper, a community activist, a lover and a father — to respond to this moment, he returned with a powerful piece. It is a salve during turbulent times. With his words, King Noire demonstrates that black Americans exist beyond our pain.

"People need to read that our love is special," King tells me over the phone. His composition is a vivid meditation on black love that is steeped in history and legacy.

Watch King Noire tackle the subject of pleasure, pain and black masculinity in his Playboy Instagram Live broadcast, July 2 at 5 pm PDT.

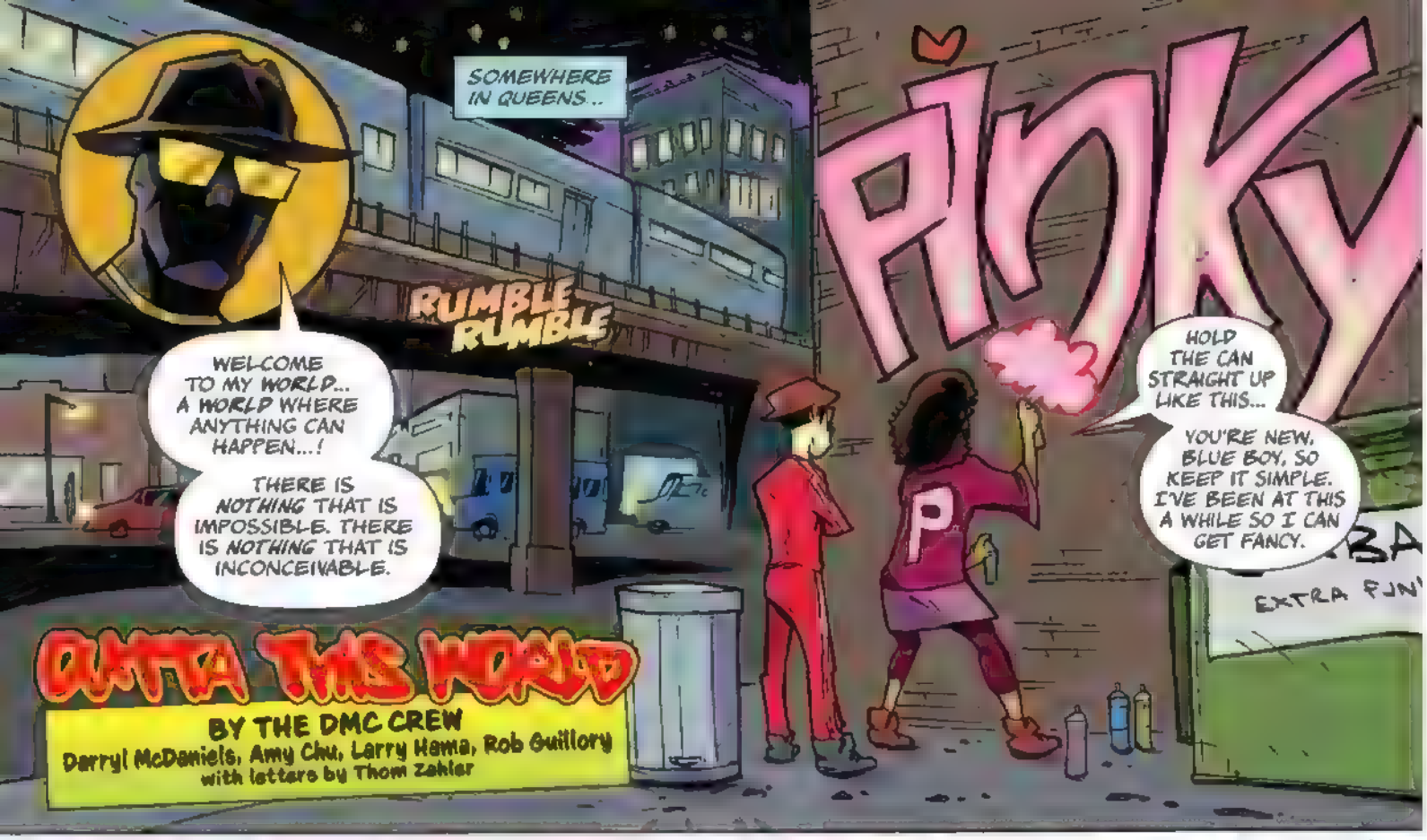
SAGE
by King Noire

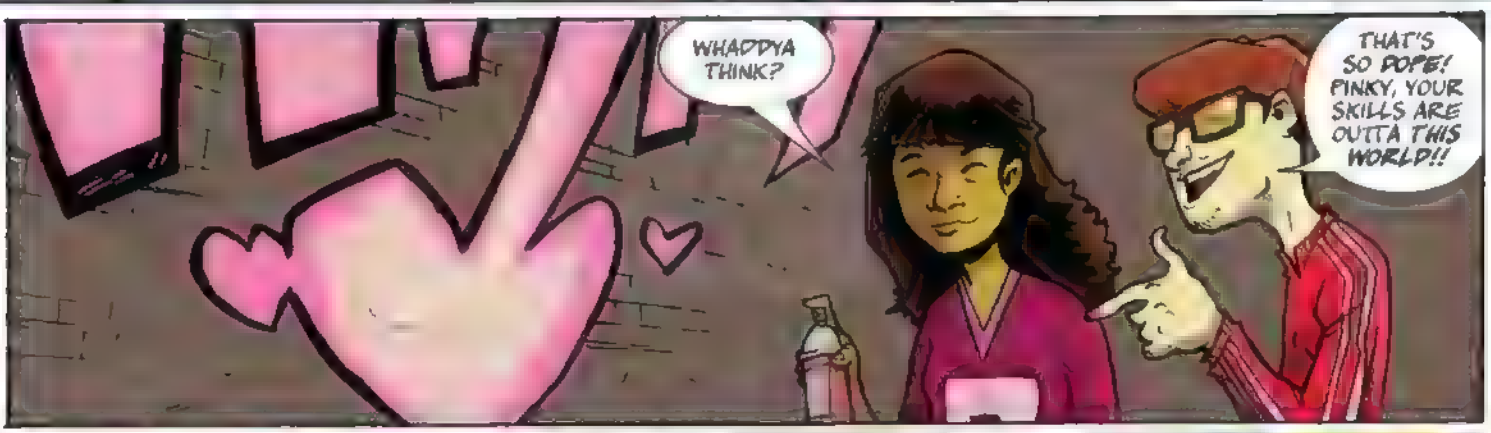
Every night I sage her from head to toe.
It has become our ritual in these times.
The world around us succumbing to its sins and we stand on the front lines.
Our scars map the journey like constellations. A mutual understanding.
Hunted by police, scorned by politicians and lamented by pundits.
Our love is treated as an enemy of the state.
"Somebody kicked in the door and shot my girlfriend"
Breonna Taylor woke up to 8 shots in her bed.
Lovers left behind mourning for another chance to hold on to hope.
Ancestors jumped brooms and got married in secret without keeping master's last name.
"Until distance do you part". .
Too much adoration would get us sold away to another plantation.
Ripped away from children and kinfolk.
Forced to hide love so that they would not call the wrath of the master's jealousy.
Those bodies that he coveted as property for torture and rape had visions beyond his plantation.
That big house still stands in Suffolk haunted by its mistress's brutality.
The slave quarters with that collared green patch planted by the door and the smell of cornbread has long since been torn down.
Unmarked graves beneath the city, this country was built on our pain.
The wind blowing through tobacco, sugar and cotton fields tells love stories in a 12 bar blues.
Tied to an oak tree, side by side next to the Moore's Ford Bridge.
After 5 years serving in the Pacific theater of World War II George Dorsey came home to his wife Mae and that longing for one another lead to a passionate conception.
Sharecroppers with bigger plans, but the GI Bill was not colorblind.
Called nigger when he returned to the states in his military uniform, freedom was a foreign idea.
The Dorseys were lynched as a family.
Husband, Wife and Child.
One of those white men cut Mae Dorsey open to remove the unborn seed from her uterus.
Those lynch mobs collected fetuses, fingers and ears.
Photographed for postcards with their children posing next to corpses burned beyond recognition.
Genitalia severed and saved in jars to be lusted over as souvenirs.
Covet our bodies and fear of our soul.
Wearing crucifixes as symbols, but what side of the burning cross were your forefathers on?
Jim Crow snatched lovers from a warm embrace.
COINTELPRO made sure our intimacy was no longer private.
The war on Black America is the government's longest running campaign.
I Can't Breathe.
Hands Up Don't Shoot.
Police fire 50 shots killing Sean Bell on his wedding day and changing the reason for wearing a suit.
Widowed with no wedding "Until distance do you part.. "
Our love sprints towards the drinking gourde.
Inspired by revolutionary romance novels, we dream of Sundiata Acoli reuniting with Assata.
Every night I sage her from head to toe.
We honor our Orishas and every soul that has suffered just to love.
They tell us Black Love is an endangered species…
Fuck you talking about?!
Love kept us alive.
There are those who don't want love for us, so we love harder.

Fuck harder

In those moments of respite, our pain transforms into pleasure, and our fantasies of freedom become one with our moments of truth.

When in bondage all love languages translate to liberty.


SOMEWHERE IN QUEENS..
RUMBLE RUMBLE
WELCOME TO MY WORLD... A WORLD WHERE ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN...!
THERE IS NOTHING THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE. THERE IS NOTHING THAT IS INCONCEIVABLE.
PINKY
HOLD THE CAN STRAIGHT UP LIKE THIS...
YOU'RE NEW, BLUE BOY, SO KEEP IT SIMPLE. I'VE BEEN AT THIS A WHILE SO I CAN GET FANCY.
EXTRA FUN!
OUTTA THIS WORLD
BY THE DMC CREW
Darryl McDaniels, Amy Chu, Larry Hama, Rob Guillory
with letters by Thom Zahler


WHADDYA THINK?
THAT'S SO DOPE! PINKY, YOUR SKILLS ARE OUTTA THIS WORLD!!

HMM, COULD USE SOME MORE EXPRESSION HERE...
HEY, WHAT'S THAT...?!

...A SHOOTING STAR?!
THAT'S NO SHOOTING STAR... MAYBE A PLANE?

IT'S HEADED THIS WAY!

KABOOM!
WHOA, WHAT THE--?
SHHH!
GARBAGE
NEWS
SCIENTISTS
PRETTY SURE
ALIENS

PINKY
GARBAGE
EXTRA FUNKY!
GAH!
LET'S MOVE!
AAHHHHHHH!!

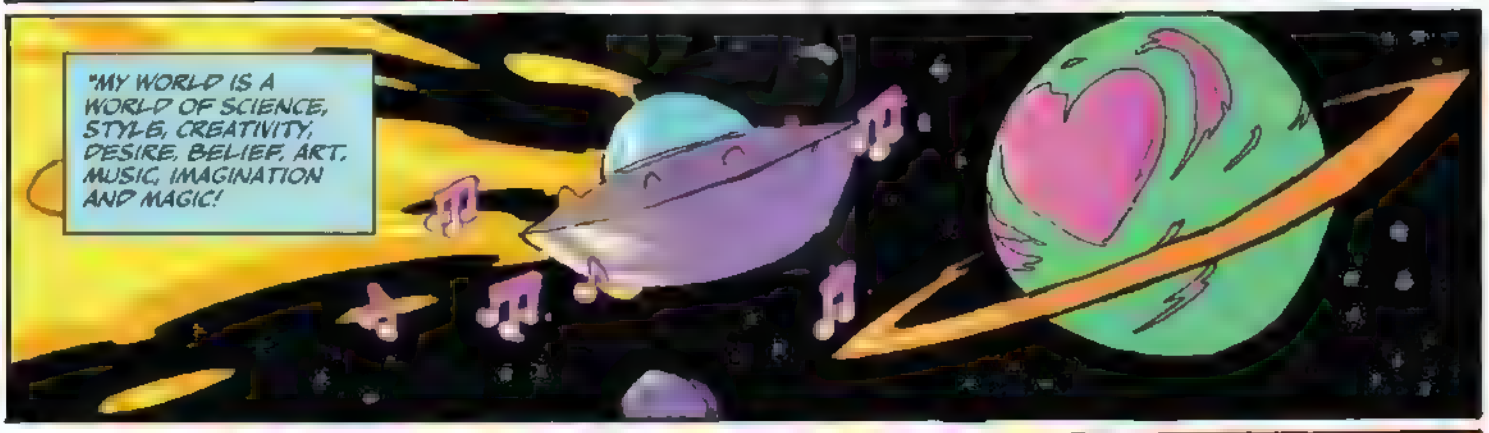
HELP!!!
THE ASSAYGUARD HAS BEEN ATTACKED BY SOME KIND OF MONSTER. WE MAY ANSWER MY DJ
GULP
YO, YOU'RE IN THE WRONG NEIGHBOR-HOOD!
IT'S DMC!
RAD!
MAN, THAT'S ONE UGLY MUTHER--
CAREFUL, SCRATCH!

SPLUP!
LET'S SLICE AND DICE!
SLIPPERY GUY. HARD TO GET A HOLD...
SQUISH!

JASE, GET BACK! ARE YOU CRAZY?!
WHAT'S HE DOING WITH THAT BOOM BOX?!
IT'S NOT A BOOM BOX. IT'S MY NEW UNIVERSAL TRANSLATOR INVENTION.
LET'S ACTUALLY TRY TO LISTEN TO WHAT SHE HAS TO SAY...

MY NAME IS BKCKY BUT JUST CALL ME B. I COME TO YOUR WORLD IN PEACE.
I COME IN SEARCH OF THE MASTER.
I JUST WANTED TO MEET THE ONE WHO IS LEGENDARY THROUGHOUT THE GALAXY.
THE MASTER?
WHAT'S HE--I MEAN SHE-- TALKING ABOUT?
DMC
RECORDS FOR SALE!
WHO, ME?
THE MASTER.
QUEEN OF THE UNIVERSE! YOUR WILD STYLE IS WELL KNOWN ON OUR PLANET WKWKYKY. WE WISH YOU TO TEACH US YOUR WAYS.
YOU MEAN SHE WASN'T ATTACKING THESE KIDS?
NOPE. IT'S ALL A CULTURAL MISUNDER-STANDING.
MY BAD, B.! HOW CAN WE MAKE IT UP TO YOU?

WELCOME TO MY WORLD, WHERE EXTRATERRESTRIALS BECOME EARTHLY.
IT'S A BLOCK PARTY!!
THE UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECT BECOMES SOMETHING OR SOMEONE YOU CAN IDENTIFY WITH!
NEVER TURNS INTO FOREVER!
UNREAL BECOMES FOR REAL!
LET'S TAKE THE PARTY TO YOUR PLACE, B.!!


"MY WORLD IS A WORLD OF SCIENCE, STYLE, CREATIVITY, DESIRE, BELIEF, ART, MUSIC, IMAGINATION AND MAGIC!

"IN MY WORLD IF YOU REACH FOR THE STARS, YOU CAN ACTUALLY TOUCH THEM.
"WELCOME TO MY WORLD. WELCOME TO MY UNIVERSE. WHERE EVERYONE BELONGS."
Visit the Universe of DMC at Darryl Makes Comics!
http://dmccomics.com/

PERC LOVE

Opioids, Instagram and two star-crossed lovers

BY **BEN WESTHOFF** ILLUSTRATIONS BY **SARAH MAXWELL**

5/325 TAB
TAKE 1 TABLET
MOUTH EVERY
HOURS AS
Store Phone:

Bennett Rhodes was scrolling through Instagram early last year when he came across a young woman named Andi Galland. Twenty years old, she posed on beaches and at music festivals, she displayed an impressive command of yoga. To Bennett she epitomized the perfect bikini-clad California girl.

From his Hollywood apartment, Bennett slid into her DMs. To his delight she quickly hit him back. She liked what she saw as well. Only 18, he was a good looking if unlikely white trap rapper with a burgeoning Instagram following. They got to chatting. Despite his hardcore raps he came from a well-to-do family in San Diego—and so did she, it turned out. She still lived there. Bennett put his cards on the table.

"I'll bet you won't come up and see me in Hollywood," he said.

"I'll bet I will," she replied.

Bennett didn't believe her until she arrived on his doorstep that same day. He was immediately charmed. She was funny, kind and down to do absolutely anything. She, likewise, was won over by his energy and charisma. He carried himself like the star he wanted to be.

Andi stayed with Bennett the entire weekend, joining him and his friends at parties and restaurants. She'd brought Xanax pills with her, and the pair indulged, helping fuel an immediate infatuation. "It became recurring, she ended up visiting us for weeks at a time," says Bennett's then-roommate, Daniel "Gibby" Gibb.

Bennett wasn't a stranger to Xanax. He sometimes rapped about it: "Them Xanies on the yellow / Bitch don't get so mellow / Your legs looking like Jell-O." But as their romance blossomed, he learned that Andi was secretly hooked on an even more dangerous drug.

Unknown to most people until a few years ago, fentanyl is 50 times stronger than heroin, an opioid that leaves users feeling like they're floating on a cloud. Incredibly cheap to produce, fentanyl is cut into other drugs—particularly heroin and prescription pills—as a cost saving measure by drug dealers. Synthetic opioids, of which fentanyl is among the most common, now kill more than 30,000 Americans per year, making them the deadliest drugs in U.S. history.

Gibby sensed the severity of Andi's problem when she would go into the bathroom "and just throw up like crazy," he says. "It was this overwhelming smell." Severe nausea is a common side effect of fentanyl.

One time Bennett and Gibby picked her up in San Diego. She was planning to visit a dealer.

"Let me buy some too," Bennett said.

"No," Andi replied adamantly. "You can't handle this."

Brushing off her concerns, Bennett began taking fentanyl with her. He knew the risks but was so obsessed with Andi that he didn't care, he wanted to feel what she was feeling. The euphoria was otherworldly, and sharing it with the person he suddenly loved more than anyone heightened the experience.

When they took fentanyl together, time stopped and their love was eternal, even as the drug overtook them and upended everything.

To Bennett's mother Liz Rhodes, their fate was Shakespearean. "They're like a Romeo and Juliet couple," she says.

During Bennett's childhood his father had a thriving international banking career and his nanny resembled Mary Poppins. Bennett was a martial arts prodigy and a surfer with infectious enthusiasm. "He could have done anything," says Liz. We're at her home just outside San Diego, the views are breathtaking. She's immaculately put together and quite accomplished herself, a corporate education specialist, former law school assistant dean and author.

At different points in his life Bennett was borderline ADD and diagnosed with anxiety. In high school his parents divorced. He associated with a gang of violent La Jolla High School surfer kids known as the Groms. In 2016, just before his 16th birthday, a terrible car accident left him with a brain bleed. His girlfriend at the time helped him recover, and he became consumed by their relationship. When they broke up he left her a suicide note, and then drove to the Coronado Bridge, though he didn't jump.

More than a cry for help, it was a cry for love, a reflection of the instability in his life. "Bennett didn't have anyone asking him about his feelings for most of his life," says Gibby. "I don't really think he got a lot of constant love, and so when he got it finally, he was really obsessed with it."

Andi was the next girl to consume him. Born Andrea Galland, she lived in San Diego's inland Tierrasanta neighborhood and attended the experimental High Tech High charter school system, where she wrote fiction and dreamed of becoming a surgeon. The school could be lenient, and she was sharp enough to "skate by without doing much," says her friend Gabriel Jacobs. He and another friend said she was troubled by a particularly traumatic childhood event she preferred not to discuss.

Her sophomore year boyfriend Zion Maly saw her become increasingly preoccupied with drugs and drinking. "I would get random Snapchats of her, like, knocked out at parties, or with people snorting cocaine off her," he says. "I cheated on Andi, and then it went all downhill. She started drinking more, partying more, doing more drugs. I felt like I was responsible."

After high school she worked restaurant jobs and hung out with her best friend Jane. (Jane's name has been changed, she declined to be interviewed.) They grew as close as two young, starry-eyed people can be, residing together in San Diego and even sharing a bed. Vacationing in exotic locations, they posted swimsuit photos to Instagram, Jane was equally stunning, and a number of brands attempted to recruit them. Like many millennials, Andi also had a "Finsta," a private "fake Instagram" page showcasing the sillier and more inebriated side of her life.

According to two people who knew them well, Andi and Jane patronized the website Seeking Arrangement, where "sugar babies," often young women, are paired with "sugar daddies," usually successful older men. Being young and beautiful on the internet gave them access to fawning men, free clothes and wild parties.

They, along with Bennett, were poster children for the Instagram age, where young people seek fame and fulfillment online, and likes and new followers supply the dopamine kicks. Instagram has changed the way young people present themselves. In Romeo and Juliet, ballrooms were where the kids found each other, picked fights and fell in love. Today's ballroom is Instagram, and it's always open. Meanwhile, the red-light district of hookup sites and the anarchic bazaars of the dark web, where just about any drug is a few clicks away, add to a digital world that can be lethally alluring to kids who, like Bennett and Andi, are struggling with addiction and trauma.

As Andi descended into fentanyl abuse, she found herself associating with dubiously motivated guys with access to drugs. Smart, ambitious and seemingly headed for big things, her potential began to erode.

Synthetic opioids already kill more people annually than any drugs in American history, but having wreaked havoc on the East Coast fentanyl is only now arriving in California. In the San Diego region, fentanyl deaths jumped by 68 percent between 2018 and 2019.

Because of dealers' propensity to secretly cut fentanyl into other drugs, today's black-market pills and powders are especially dangerous for experimentation-minded young people. Fentanyl has been particularly deadly in hip-hop, killing rappers Lil Peep, Mac Miller and Lexii Alijai, as well as music legends Prince and Tom Petty.

Though rap artists including Bennett, who rapped under the name Beanie, glorify popping pills and drinking lean, virtually no rappers brag about doing hard drugs like fentanyl. But since fentanyl is increasingly cut into black market pills that look exactly like Xanax or Per

cocet, it's often essentially the same thing.

Andi and Bennett snorted crushed-up tablets called Percocet 30s. These weren't pharmaceutical-grade pills containing acetaminophen and oxycodone; in fact, actual Percocet doesn't come in 30 milligram doses. These were counterfeit blue pills, made with fentanyl. Andi and Bennett knew this, but it didn't slow them down. In fact, it made their love feel more real. Bennett called the phenomenon "Perc love."

"It was the most magical high I ever felt. Literally I found true love in a person and in a drug," says Bennett's brother Mark Rhodes, who experienced Perc love himself while taking the pills with Jane, noting that it dulls one's libido even while it ignites one's infatuation. (He says he soon came to his senses, quit fentanyl and broke things off with her.)

For Bennett and Andi, this euphoria was wrapped up in their happiness with each other. They stayed up all night in his room, watching Gossip Girl in a haze or just kissing and cuddling. Perc love was easy to confuse with actual love.

They chased fantasies: gritty rap star and carefree traveler. The social media identities they fashioned for themselves papered over pain from their upbringings, and fentanyl served to smooth out the rough edges. When they snorted the powder, they had all the love in the world they needed; Perc love helped them be with each other, and it helped them be with themselves. But when the opioids wore off, their self-confidence plummeted, and reality set in.

As they grew closer, Andi shared her drug contact. She received the Percocet 30s from a man named Andrew, she told Bennett. Andrew was another man apparently auditioning to be her sugar daddy, but he wasn't an investment banker or wealthy financier. He was a fentanyl trafficker, with an operation stretching across the border.

Daren Andrew Lee goes by his middle name. Born in 1983, he grew up in Mormon country, living for a time in Salt Lake City and studying organic chemistry at Brigham Young University, Hawaii. With a white-collar résumé atypical for a dealer of street drugs, he arrived in San Diego to begin work with a biopharma company in early 2013.

But Andrew suffered personal setbacks, including becoming estranged from his young son and getting involved with heroin. In 2015, he received probation after selling heroin to undercover cops, according to court records, he "told officers he... frequently crossed into Mexico to bring drugs back over the border to sell." In 2017, he was charged with misdemeanor possession of controlled substances including heroin, and he successfully completed a drug treatment program. (For all the well-deserved bluster against the war on drugs, drug sentences have actually been reduced quite a bit in recent years.)

Somehow, he maintained steady work in the pharmaceutical industry. According to his LinkedIn profile, he started as a clinical operations consultant in May 2018 for Acadia Pharmaceuticals, a San Diego-based company making medications for disorders including Parkinson's disease. He was hired temporarily through employment agency Suna Solutions, his page notes, and under his areas of experience he lists "Opioid Induced Constipation." "This is by FAR the best job I have had in the industry in over 10 years!" he wrote.

Life was good. He bought a BMW and moved into a luxury apartment overlooking the Padres' baseball stadium. He displayed his amateur photography work on his Instagram page—beaches at sunset and dazzling downtown cityscapes.

It's unclear when Andrew began trafficking fentanyl pills from Mexico or how he began his courtship of Andi and Jane, but the two events overlapped. He sought to impress them by offering gifts like shoes and watches, says Gibby, who grew close to both women. "He was creepy and weird," Gibby goes on, adding Andi and Jane were only "using" him for his fentanyl access. "They could do it because they were very attractive, and they had this addiction."

In the fall of 2019, he posted a picture of the three of them in his elevator. For the photo, Andrew donned sunglasses and attempted to look suave. Jane and Andi wear short skirts, their arms draped over him. Apparently attempting to be funny, Andrew wrote: "Can't believe what progress [Jane and Andi] have made since I met them panhandling, I'd say they clean up nice. . #futurehousemates."

Bennett's father David—a large guy whose face, like his son's, radiates curiosity and kindness—says that, in the last week of November, Bennett detailed to his parents conversations he and Andi had with Andrew. David listened carefully as Bennett laid out Andrew's attempts to recruit Andi and Jane to move into his apartment and help him expand his fentanyl business.

According to Bennett's parents, Andrew explained his smuggling operation and told Bennett and Andi his position with Acadia helped insulate him. "Lee bragged about using his pharma company's credentials to get easily back and forth across the Mexican border," David says. (Andrew did not respond to requests for comment; nor did Acadia Pharmaceuticals.)

In the spring of 2019, Bennett's parents caught wind of his fentanyl habit, and his mother Liz rushed him off to Hawaii for a week, to sober up. He swam in the ocean and played ukulele, an instrument he learned from the now-deceased Chargers great Junior Seau, a family friend. Liz expressed her concern about Bennett's drug-centered relationship with Andi. Bennett pledged to stay clean, he hoped to help Andi

The red-light district of hookup sites and the anarchic bazaars of the dark web add to a digital world that can be lethally alluring.

beat fentanyl too.

"He was going to save Andi, then save himself, and then they would live a clean life together," says Liz.

That summer Bennett moved into a new apartment in Hollywood, just off Sunset Boulevard, with his brother Mark. It was a young hip-hopper's Shangri-La, a crash pad filled with bongs, top-line recording equipment and rolls of fake $100 bills for music videos. Mark is a driven rap producer and singer-songwriter known as MTStreets, and he and Bennett attended the Los Angeles Recording School. They called their music together "Hollywood trap"—a melding of the glossy and the grimy. Mark is most in his element when blasting his music between pulls from the water pipe, rapping along with Bennett's best tracks.

Those who knew their backgrounds might blanche at their images as gritty hip-hop artists—Bennett once wrote in an Instagram post, "Hard to believe we came from nothing"—considering their upbringing in tony La Jolla, and that their mother leased the Hollywood apartment. Still, hip-hop has always been about remaking oneself, and the two brothers' obvious love for the trap genre helped them pull it off.

Having worked up a business plan for his music career with his dad, Bennett was now preparing his debut mixtape, Never Comfortable, spending down his five-figure settlement from his high school car accident on well-known collaborators—including associates of his hero, Gucci Mane, a rapper who glamorizes Percocet in his music.

"We had dreams of winning Grammys, of being millionaires," Mark says. Bennett built up an Instagram following of nearly 10,000, posing with gold chains, vape pens and stacks of cash.

Mark and Bennett drew into their orbit local performers and impresarios, including co-workers from restaurants where they worked. Paul Fleming, a Los Angeles rapper known as Cloud, was shocked when Bennett announced his sudden resignation from Jersey Mike's, tossing aside his hat and apron mid-shift and walking out. "We have a higher calling," Bennett had said.

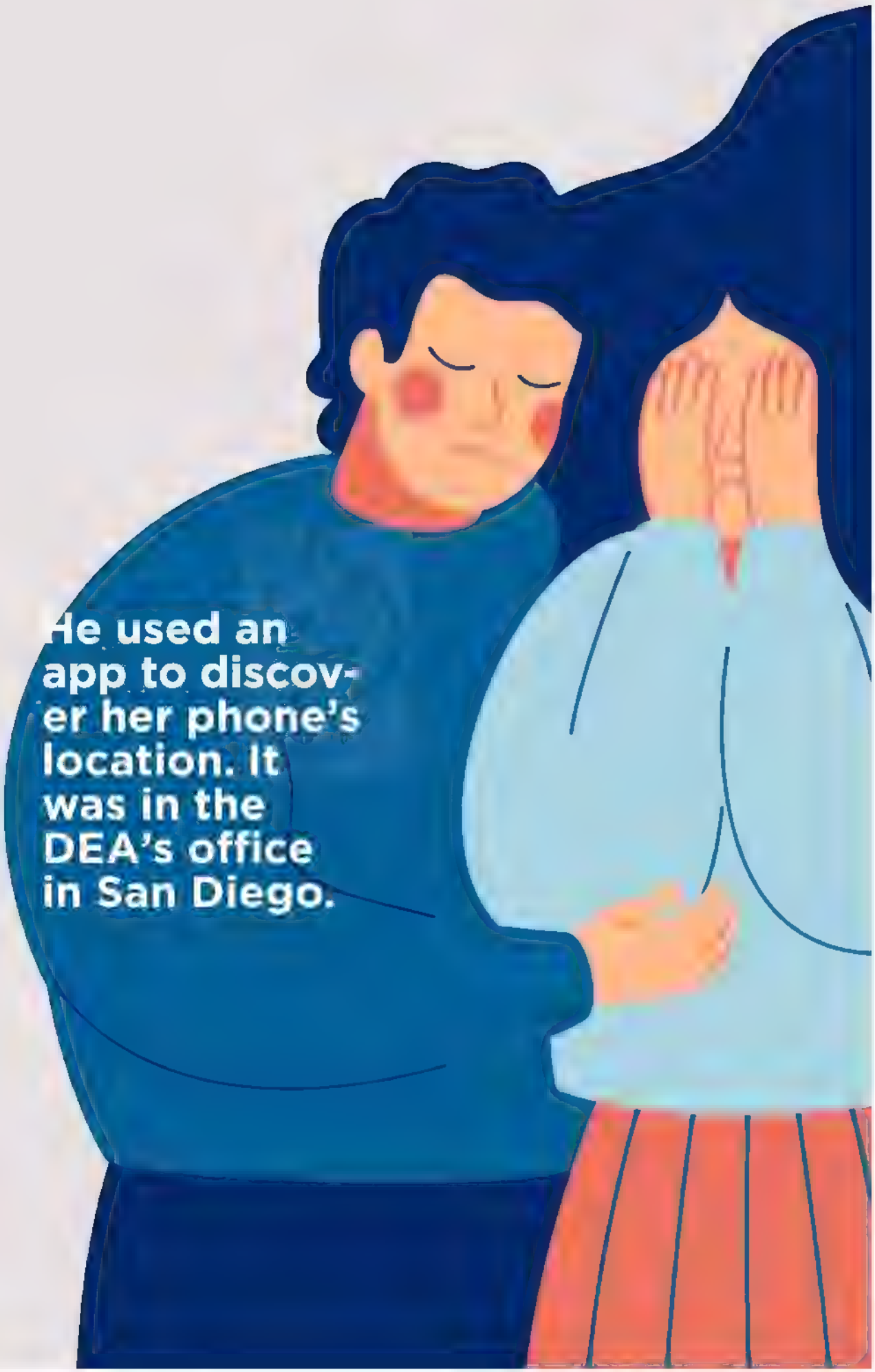
This impressed Cloud, who also welcomed Andi and her glamorous energy into his social circle. "She was like Marilyn Monroe," he says. "They were next."

But behind the scenes fentanyl was back in Andi and Bennett's lives. While high everything was great, but when they crashed they were miserable, and the only balm was more fentanyl. Andi began to withdraw. While she maintained admiration and even love for Bennett, her commitment to the relationship waned. "But Bennett was not letting it go," Gibby says. "Like a puzzle piece that doesn't fit."

His addiction out of control, Bennett agreed to check into Passages Malibu, an elite treatment center known for its steep price (as much as $100,000 a month for a private room) and for not adhering to a 12-step recovery model. There he experienced the agony of detox. "It was like skin was being ripped off of his body," remembers his father—only to find even greater agony on the other side.

Perc love helped them be with each other, and it helped them be with themselves.

On Sunday, November 24, after being unable to reach Andi by


He used an app to discover her phone's location. It was in the DEA's office in San Diego.

her. "What are some of our best family memories?" he asked.

His mother was perplexed. "Bennett, you have a lifetime of amazing stuff," she said. "At home I'll pull out every photo album and we'll reconnect you to your wonderful childhood."

Bennett spent his first night out of rehab at home, with Mark keeping close tabs on him. The next day, November 30, they boarded a train to San Diego.

They planned to celebrate a late Thanksgiving with the family, but when Liz picked up the boys at the train station, Bennett wasn't himself. He seemed "unhinged" and "drugged," she said—but not on fentanyl. He had apparently taken lorazepam, an anti-anxiety medicine best known as Ativan, that Liz believes he received from Passages. Like Xanax, Ativan is a benzodiazepine. It's a downer that, when combined with fentanyl, another downer, is particularly lethal.

An argument broke out. Bennett, reeling, made nasty accusations against his mother, and she told him to get his act together. Bennett and Mark eventually decided to spend the night at the Carlsbad apartment of their friends William and Hannah. First, Bennett visited Andi's parents to offer his condolences. They took him in like a son, and each consoled the other. At some point that day he also made his way downtown. Near Andrew's apartment, he met a dealer and purchased six or seven Percocet 30s.

Back in Carlsbad he acted like nothing had happened. He said goodnight to his brother and friends. "He gave us all a hug; he thanked us for letting him crash," says William. "I felt that everything would be okay. It was a safe place." Bennett went into William's bedroom and closed the door.

In the morning, Mark checked on his brother. The door was locked, so he picked it. He found Bennett face down on the bed. His body was cold. Mark turned him over and saw that his face was purple.

Bennett had died exactly a week after Andi. He was 19. The entire relationship, from Andi's appearance at Bennett's door to their fatal overdoses, lasted less than a year.

"It was almost like an out-of-body experience" hearing his son was dead, says David. "Just the worst feeling a human could feel."

Bennett left a note of sorts, by way of a short video found on his phone. "I love everything and everyone so much," reads the caption of the video, in which Bennett flashes a series of cryptic gang signs, and then shows off a line of fentanyl on the bathroom lavatory, the same line that presumably killed him.

Some family members believe he knew the dose would be fatal, and

thus his death was suicide. His mother isn't sure. "I don't think it was intentional suicide," says Liz. "I do believe he knew the risks. Maybe he didn't care. But I think he simply went back to using because he was in such a fragile, painful time."

Ultimately, Bennett fulfilled both of his desires following Andi's death. He numbed himself into oblivion, and he got retribution. Shortly before he died, Bennett explained Daren Andrew Lee's smuggling operation, says David.

Andrew went to Mexico frequently, Bennett told him, allegedly purchasing some 7,000 pills per week for about $3 each. Once brought back across the border, he sold the pills for $25 to $30 each.

David relayed this information to the DEA, who put Andrew's name into a database. Only three days after Bennett's death, on December 4, 2019, Andrew returned from Mexico through the San Ysidro land port of entry. His passport was flagged, and Andrew was found with two Ziploc bags, according to court records, one containing 21 grams of "blue circular pills," which tested positive for fentanyl, and another harboring 23 grams of "white bar shaped pills," which tested positive for heroin. Though the purity of the pills isn't known, this was likely a large amount considering 2 milligrams of pure fentanyl can kill. "Lee admitted to law enforcement that he obtained heroin and fentanyl pills in Mexico with the intent to distribute them in the United States," read his court records. He pleaded guilty and, in January, was sentenced to four years, two of them suspended.

Both Andi's and Bennett's families remain devastated. Bennett's brother Mark—his best friend, close collaborator, and fellow dreamer—has sorrow in his eyes as he goes through the motions of everyday life in the apartment where his brother no longer lives. The sadness is tempered only by anger. He has blame to go around, but maintains especially strong words for Daren Andrew Lee. "He knew Andi died, and he kept selling. He knew Bennett died, and he kept selling," says Mark, his voice thickening. "Basically, that's the definition of a serial killer."

Ultimately, Andi and Bennett were overtaken by the latest, deadliest trends in music and drug culture. Monied kids have dreamed big and partied wild for decades, but they had the bad fortune to come of age when a new, ultra-potent chemical was killing more Americans than any drug previously, at a time when the most popular music culture glamorized it by calling it something it isn't.

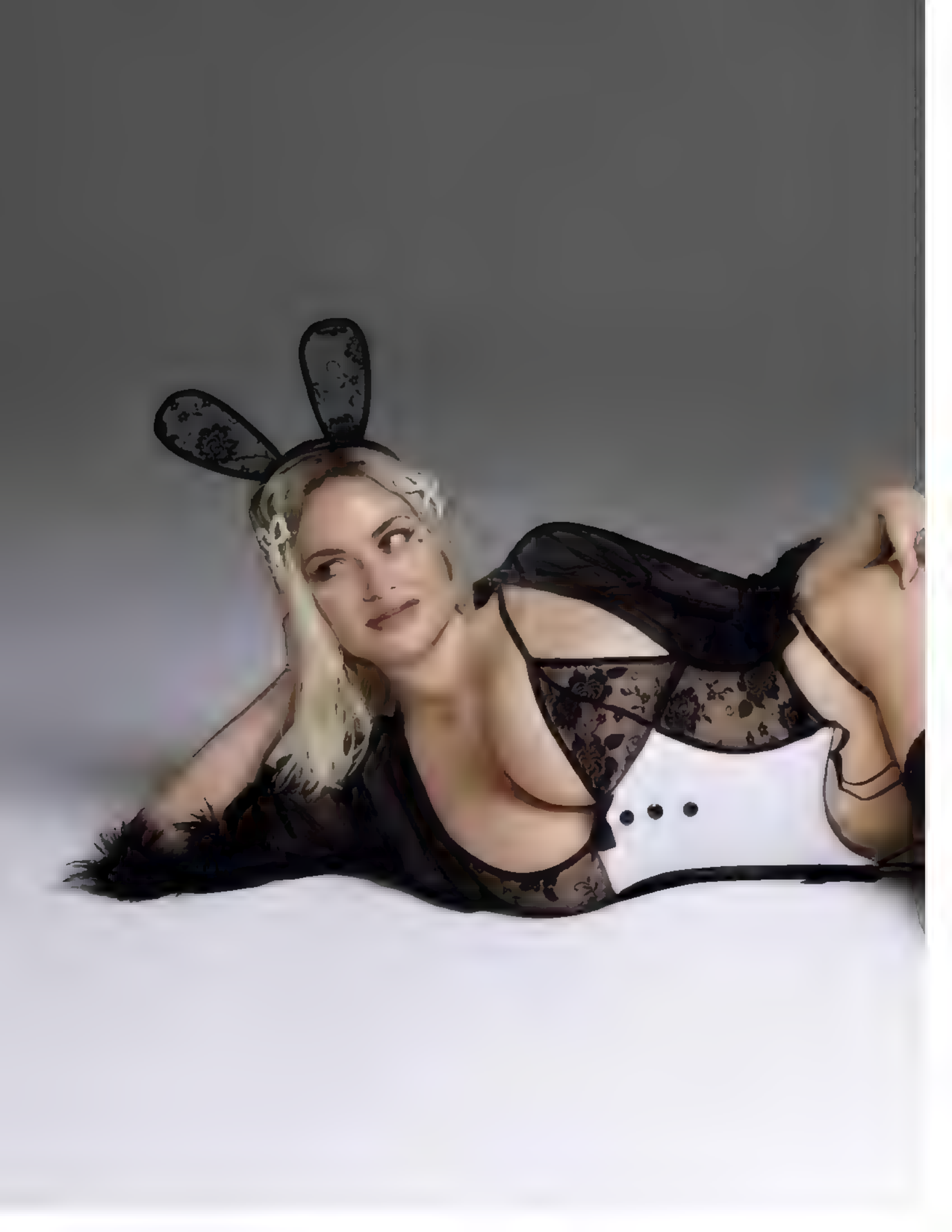
Bennett's parents have immersed themselves in trying to get justice for Bennett—pushing for murder charges against Andrew and investigating why Acadia Pharmaceuticals took him on in the first place. They are also working to launch awareness programs geared toward youth, many of whom have no idea that any black-market pill or powder could be spiked with a lethal dose of fentanyl. Liz wants to focus on music and video, mediums "that are easily consumable via social media," she says. Liz is also committed to "reducing shame and bringing the epidemic into family conversations."

"If we save just one life," says David Rhodes, "it's worth it."

Bennett's dream of remaining by Andi's side has come true, in a sense: He is buried close to her at El Camino Memorial Park in San Diego, perhaps only 40 feet apart.

"He had a dream and wanted a life with this girl," says Liz. "Neither is to blame for the other's death. They were adults dancing too close to the flame."

Bennett's parents have immersed themselves in trying to get justice.



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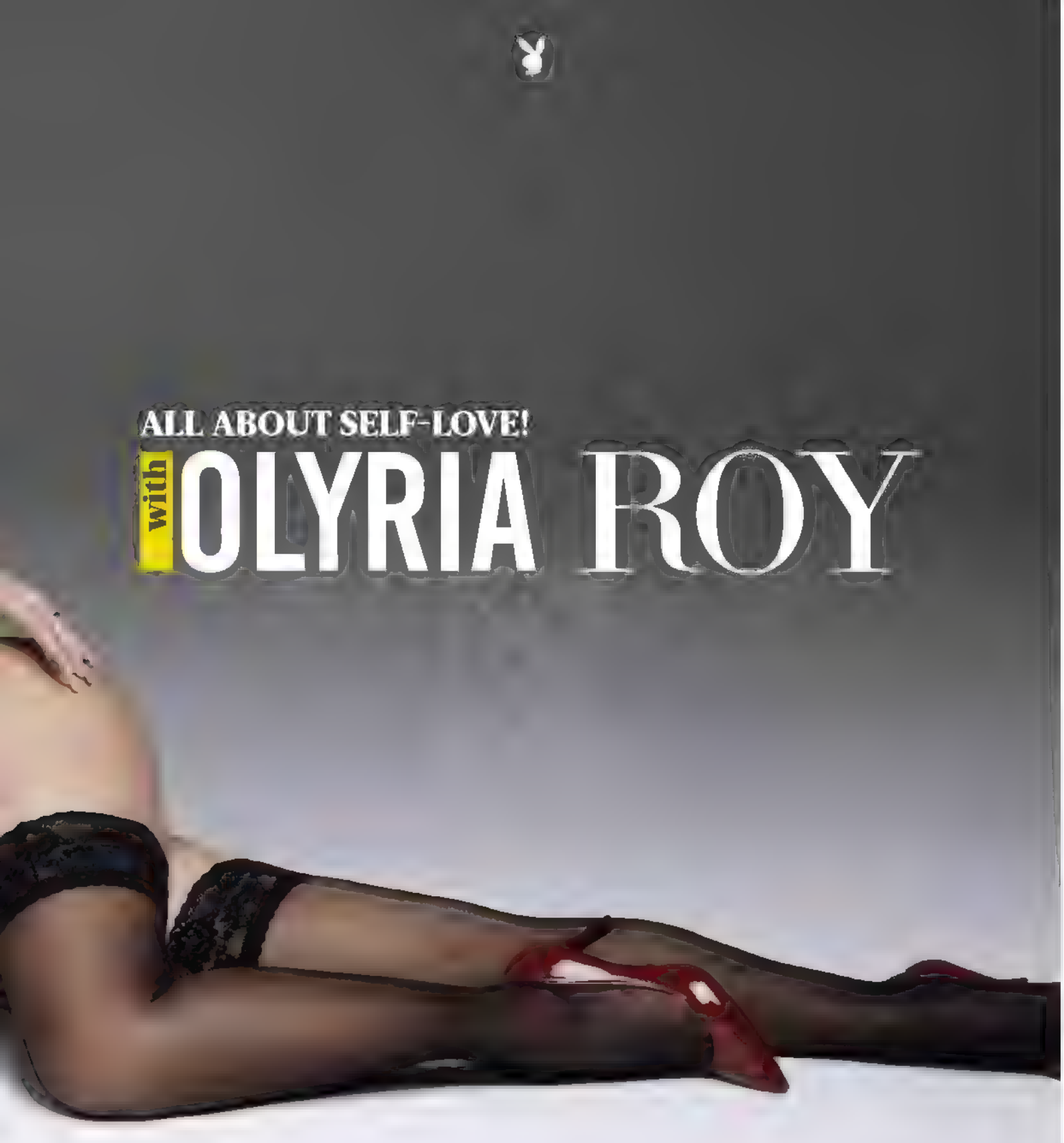
with OLYRIA ROY



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MUA **Oksana Laskina | @laskinao**
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What an honor to have you as our February cover! Were you excited to shoot for Playboy? It's an honor for me too, thank you so much. A Playboy cover shoot has been a dream for me, I am so very excited!

Tell us something surprising about you? I speak five languages fluently and hope to learn at least one more!

Describe yourself in one sentence... I am a model, singer, social media influencer, body-positivity and self-love advocate.

What are some of your hobbies? Swimming, going to the cinema with friends and above all travel! I love exploring all the rich cultural, historical, and geographic variety the world has to offer.

What is your biggest turn-on? Simply put, earned confidence. Arrogant and egotistical men don't really impress me, but a man who is truly confident in himself, his abilities, and his vision for life and who has a track record of achievements to back that confidence up, is, for me, the kind of person that embodies the masculine ideal

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far? The biggest chal-

sized woman and proud of that! As a result, have taken it upon myself to build my own fan

rather than forcing myself to conform to it. If

been closed in the first place.

Any last words you would like to share with the readers? Never give up on your dreams! Find mentors or advisers in the field you are pursuing, or read the advice of experts online

and make your own choices life is unique! You know, was told that if a model, would d that it'll close

Playboy Interview

Jay-Z

A candid conversation with rap's leading man about feuding with Nas, growing up with Biggie, dating Beyonce and learning that God loves a drug dealer

INTERVIEW BY **ROB TANNENBAUM** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DAVID ROSE**

Here's a story about Jay-Z. One recent night he was gambling with Kevin Liles, president of Def Jam, the label that distributes Jay Z's records. When the bets were finished, Liles was down $10,000. The next day he gave $10,000 cash to a messenger and sent it to the studio where Jay Z was working. The rapper refused the money and sent the messenger back with these words: "Tell Kevin he's got to deliver it himself."

Jay-Z plays for big stakes and insists on honor. When he prevails, he doesn't hesitate to gloat or talk trash. His favorite basketball player is Michael Jordan and, like Jordan, he savors competition as much as victory.

This story affirms the self-portrait that he draws in hits like "Big Pimpin'," "H to the Izzo" and "Girls, Girls, Girls": He's the Don Corleone of rap ("Young Vito" is one of his many nicknames), a street-hardened former drug dealer who drinks Cristal, smokes cigars and trusts almost no one. Especially women. In a music genre where arrogance is expected, he's set a new standard, calling himself Jay Hova, god of the microphone. Bill O'Reilly has accused him of damaging children with cursing and "corrosive lyrics." Appearing on a Missy Elliott record last year, Jay Z offered a terse reply: "Fuck Bill O'Reilly."

He was born Shawn Corey Carter, the youngest of four children, and grew up in the notoriously bleak Brooklyn public housing complex known as Marcy Projects. His father left the family when Shawn was 11, the kids were raised by their mom, Gloria, and by the streets, not always in that order.

Reasonable Doubt, released in 1996 and widely recognized as a classic, made Jay Z an underground legend, bragging that he'd "sold it all, from crack to opium" (apparently true) and had made "underworld ties" (apparently not). In "You Must Love Me," he examines the memory of shooting his brother when he was 12 (his brother survived).

Then came his breakthrough, "Hard Knock Life," a 1998 single that sampled a chorus from the Broadway musical Annie. Jay Z was no longer known only to rap devotees. As he said, he "brought the suburbs to the hood." And he continued to dispute the perception that he was one more remorseless street thug draped in gold. "Motherfuckers say that I'm foolish, I only talk about jewels," he intoned. "Do you fools listen to music, or do you just skim through it?"

Though it now seems like a smart business decision to form his own record label, Roc A Fella, Jay Z started the company with two friends only because no label would sign him. From necessity came fortune. The company has diversified into Rocawear, a thriving clothing company, and Roc A Fella Films. His label has signed a new generation of rappers, including Cam'ron, Memphis Bleek and Beanie Sigel, all of whom Jay Z promotes on his own records.

Recording at the unusual pace of one or sometimes two records each year, Jay Z, 32, has made nine albums since 1996. And he's endured shifting trends in a way no other rapper has. Released in November 2002, The Blueprint 2: The Gift and the Curse is a double CD that stretches to include R&B, dancehall, rock and a duet with Beyoncé Knowles. It was his fifth album to debut at number one on the pop charts, an accomplishment unmatched by any other rapper. With more than 16 million records sold, he trails only Eminem as rap's top seller. Shortly after Blueprint 2 was released, we sent writer Rob Tannenbaum to interview Jay Z in New York City.

PLAYBOY: Rap careers are usually over fast: one or two hits, then styles change and a new guy comes along. Why have you endured while other rappers haven't?

JAY-Z: I would say that it's from still being able to relate to people. It's natural to lose yourself when you have success, to start surrounding yourself with fake people. In The 48 Laws of Power, it says the worst thing you can do is build a fortress around yourself. I still got the people who grew up with me, my cousin and my childhood friends. This guy right here (gestures to the studio manager), he's my friend, and he told me that one of my records, Volume Three, was wack. People set higher standards for me, and I love it.

PLAYBOY: But we were just in a chauffeured car, on our way to free courtside seats at a Nets game, and we saw your new music video playing on BET.

JAY-Z: Yeah. (Laughs) I'm still separated. You told me to separate. I'm still looking in on that guy. Like, Wow, that guy's doing it!

PLAYBOY: So how can people relate to you when you possess so many things they don't have?

JAY-Z: I've been through a lot of things, so I could write songs off memory for another four years. Since my first album, it was like, Wow, that guy's really hitting it on the head about life in the streets. Now people are growing with me, and they're seeing the integrity is real. A guy came up to me at the gym the other day and told me, "I know you now." I just rhyme about what I've been through.

PLAYBOY: Roc A Fella has grossed an estimated $300 million.

JAY-Z: Wow!

PLAYBOY: How much of that has ended up in your pocket?

JAY-Z: (Smiles) I've got about $5,000 on me now. I do. That's just the leftovers for me. I went to Miami two weeks ago, and we gambled on the plane. I won a little bit of money, and I still got it in my pocket.

PLAYBOY: How much do you usually bet?

JAY-Z: That night I won about $17,000 from my friends.

PLAYBOY: You take money from friends?

JAY-Z: Yeah. It's gambling! They take mine too. They don't give me a walk. They don't say sorry. Actually, they laugh. Then they go buy shit. A friend who won recently paged me the next day. "I just bought a plasma TV. Thank y'all!"

PLAYBOY: I hear your best game is guts. What's that?

JAY-Z: It's like a three-card poker game. I taught Will Smith to play guts. Now he has guts tournaments. I don't know if he wants people to know that. I talk too much. What if Will Smith gets hooked on gambling? He's clean cut, he can't gamble. I can gamble because I'm from the hood (makes a mean face). We're having a guts game this Thursday. We're trying to get Michael Jordan to come. Can I say that too? Damn, I'm telling everybody's business. God, I just told on Will Smith and Michael Jordan, huh?

PLAYBOY: You refer to yourself as "the $40 million boy" on Blueprint 2. Is that an accurate number?

JAY-Z: I don't know the math. How'd I get that number? I might be past that by now.

PLAYBOY: We bet you know exactly how much you have at any given moment.

JAY-Z: Everyone should, don't you think? Especially in rap music. There's nothing worse than putting in all this work and waking up broke. I've seen it happen, and I vowed it won't happen to me.

PLAYBOY: Jam Master Jay of Run-D.M.C. died broke. How does that happen?

JAY-Z: I always have to blame it on the accountants. They have to be tough, they have to be willing to quit if a guy calls up and says, "I want to buy a new car."

PLAYBOY: Have any of your accountants ever said no to you?

JAY-Z: I fire my accountant every year. Every time I pay taxes, he's fired. Uncle Sam did not go in that recording booth with me. He didn't bang his head against the wall until he came up with the hook for "Hovi Baby." It's crazy, the checks that I send to the government, for nothing. And then my accountant says, "Be happy that you're fortunate enough to cut this check." Oh yeah? Fuck you! You're fucking fired! That's my response. Then I hire him back, because he's right.

PLAYBOY: When you named the label Roc A Fella, did you know anything about the Rockefeller family?

JAY-Z: I just knew they was millionaires. That was the part that stuck.

PLAYBOY: All that money, and you still release records more often than any other rapper. Why work so hard? Is it just for the money?

JAY-Z: I'm doing it for the artistry. I'm doing it to try new things, to create, to invent. I'm a guy who wants to see rap go further, even after me. I want people to open their minds, start making different types of music. Don't follow what's going on. That's what hip-hop is about. It's a rebellious voice. You're going left? Then I'm going right. But say it like this. (Sneers) I'm going right.

PLAYBOY: How did growing up in the Marcy Projects shape you?

JAY-Z: It was a poor neighborhood, but you learned loyalty and integrity. You learned to respect other people, because it was a mine field. If you disrespect somebody, or act dishonorable, you get hurt. Somebody puts you in your place. So I learned integrity. It's a beautiful place to grow up, as far as having honor.

PLAYBOY: Was it dangerous?

JAY-Z: It wasn't safe. Everyone there was poor and trying to get ahead. There was not much hope. You put all those ingredients together, you have people who are willing to do anything at any time

What am I going to do, lose my life? What is my life worth, anyway? That can't be a safe environment. In each of the buildings, there's six floors, four families on each floor, three buildings connected together. Everyone's on top of everybody else. That's a powder keg. Then crack hit around 1985. You had so many people strung out. I mean, everybody. It was an epidemic.

PLAYBOY: And have those projects changed since you were a kid?

JAY-Z: (Shakes his head) There's no lawyers, no doctors, no psychiatrists. Everyone that makes money moves out. They just go. I want to tell kids, "Yo, I'm Jay Z, ..." Not even Jay Z. "I'm Shawn Carter, from 5C. I lived in that building right there, the one you live in now. And it can happen for you. I don't know what it is that you want to do, but something will happen for you."

PLAYBOY: Like you, most of the kids you grew up with didn't have fathers.

JAY-Z: I could name the ones who did (laughs). There were about three in the whole project.

PLAYBOY: Your dad split when you were 11. What happens when a boy grows up without a dad?

JAY-Z: He learns how to be a man in the streets. Everyone needs that role model, that blueprint, to guide you through. Depending on your environment, it could be a bad thing.

PLAYBOY: You've talked about your dad in a few songs, especially "Where Have You Been?"

JAY-Z: In hindsight, I was hard on the guy in a lot of songs. At that time, everyone was leaving. They was leaving before the kid was born. He wasn't totally a scumbag—not totally. After those songs, I told my mom I wanted to talk to him. I can't keep living in the past. My mom got in touch with him. The first time he was supposed to come to my house, he didn't come. I figured it was embarrassing for him, going to his son's house. I got mad again. Like, "All right, forget it, then! I ain't reaching out no more!" Then my mom told me he was finally ready to come over, and we just kicked it—I told him everything that was on my mind. And we shook hands, like men.

PLAYBOY: Is he a dad to you now?

JAY-Z: I don't think anyone can be a dad to me at this point. I learned how to go inside my own mind, to figure it out, to learn as I go along.

PLAYBOY: You went to high school with the Notorious B.I.G. How did you end up recording together?

JAY-Z: We always said we was going to do something together, and I was doing my first album, so we went into the studio and did "Brooklyn's Finest." He was sitting there, trying to memorize his lyrics, and I passed him a pen and paper, like, "Here." And he was like, "No, I'm cool, you can take that." I was like, "Nah, I don't need that." That's so strange, to see two people who don't write down lyrics. At the time, no one else was doing that. After that, we spoke every day.

PLAYBOY: Who do you think killed Biggie?

JAY-Z: I don't know, man. I have no idea. (Pause) I don't want to further that. I don't want to talk about what I think.

PLAYBOY: Did Biggie's death, and Tupac's, make you more cautious about starting beefs with people?

JAY-Z: No, because I don't believe either one of them got killed over rap music. That was just something to help the media sell magazines.

PLAYBOY: They were both rappers. They both got shot. So obviously they pissed off someone.

JAY-Z: Not rapping.

PLAYBOY: What did you think of the Los Angeles Times story last year that said Biggie paid gang members to kill Tupac?

JAY-Z: That was just irresponsible journalism bullshit. It's terrible to throw dirt on a guy's name who's not here. If it would have been about a politician, or somebody else powerful, there would be lawsuits. There would be hell to pay. It's a lack of respect when they deal with rappers.

PLAYBOY: The guy who has cornered the market on disrespecting rap music is Bill O'Reilly.

JAY-Z: He's just doing shock TV. Now he knows, "Oh shit, the power of hip-hop—if I say something about them, my ratings go right up."

PLAYBOY: Would you ever go on his show and explain your point of view?

JAY-Z: Why? He don't care. He's doing what he do—he's feeding his family. It's not about his understanding. I don't believe he wants to understand. It's obvious he's not researching the truth.

PLAYBOY: What's left for you to do that you haven't already?

JAY-Z: Have kids. And run Universal Records. Not black music either. I got to run the whole ship. I'll make it cool to be different. Don't sound like everybody else—we don't even accept that. I get joy just sharing my knowledge with artists, like a guru. Put the love back in music. Make a record you know will be somebody's song, will mark somebody's life. Don't sell records—make music.

PLAYBOY: Universal is the biggest record company in the country. It would be hard to run the label while you're a rapper.

JAY-Z: That's what I'm saying: Next album is my last album. I'm freeing up my time. The next one's coming with a book, so you know it's the end.

PLAYBOY: You say that you're going to record only one more album, but you have been talking about retiring since your first record.

JAY-Z: You don't understand. When I said Reasonable Doubt was going to be my first and only album, I meant it. "He made one album, then, puff, he's gone with the wind." But now I really mean it. Write the book, release the Black Album, go head Universal.

PLAYBOY: And maybe do a guest spot on other people's records?

JAY-Z: Not a guest spot at 50. That's disrespectful. That's just embarrassing.

PLAYBOY: You can't be a rapper at 50?

JAY-Z: No, forget it. Just a guru.

PLAYBOY: What's the Black Album?

JAY-Z: It's my last album. I want it to be the prequel to Reasonable Doubt. I want my mother to open it, then I go through my life and end saying how I want to do "Ain't No Nigga," which is my first hit,

> "I'm trying to get grown up and not talk about figures anymore. I'm learning that the big cats don't talk about money, only us ignorant rappers. I have to get sophisticated with my paper. I'm not nouveau money."

and trying to find a beat for it. "I keep it fresher than the next bitch" (the first line of "Ain't No Nigga"). Then it ends. I want it to come out on November 28—Black Friday. Then, no more albums.

PLAYBOY: You're a betting man, right?

JAY-Z: Mmm hmm.

PLAYBOY: Here's a bet: We've got $20 that says your next record isn't the last.

JAY-Z: And if I make more than one album, I give it back?

PLAYBOY: No, you're giving us odds of 50-1. If you lose, you pay us $1,000.

JAY-Z: That's a great bet. That's a wonderful bet. (Grabs the money, puts it in his pocket) I just got $20! And I'm gonna keep it too.

PLAYBOY: Fine, but we'll get our money in about 18 months, after you've made two more records.

JAY-Z: Ya ha-ha! That's a great bet, for you. I would take that bet, too, if it was switched. It's on tape too. My integrity is legendary. I would never fuck you out of $20. If there's a discrepancy I'll give it to you just so it won't be on our minds.

PLAYBOY: Only one rapper has sold more records than you: Eminem. Is that because he's white?

JAY-Z: He's an extraordinary talent. He's a genius, bottom line. But race has something to do with it. If you listen to his record White America, he addresses that topic.

PLAYBOY: He says if he were black, he'd have sold half as many records.

JAY-Z: Right. It might be less than that (laughs).

PLAYBOY: So who are your peers? Who do you compete with?

JAY-Z: There was one person: Big. If I heard "Who Shot Ya?" in a club, I would leave and go make some music. That's not to take anything away from Eminem or Nas, I just don't look at them as that.

PLAYBOY: It's like when Michael Jordan had Magic Johnson.

JAY-Z: Right. I heard Jordan say, when Magic had AIDS, he felt like he was cheating him. "You leaving now? Yo, I need you. You're going to define my greatness." It was selfish.

PLAYBOY: Then Jordan got bored and retired, like you're threatening to do.

JAY-Z: See that? You just lost $20.

PLAYBOY: No, because guess who's playing basketball tonight? Michael Jordan.

JAY-Z: You know why you lose again? Because Jordan stayed a year too much. I wanna cry for him. Fuck!

PLAYBOY: How's the rap game going to survive without you?

JAY-Z: Hey, man, it had better find a way. It existed before me, and I'm sure it will exist after me.

PLAYBOY: Rap appears simple because it's just rhyming—but you need a lot more words and ideas in rap than you do in a pop song.

JAY-Z: That's true. I mean, I wrote a couple of pop songs for Mya. I just started doing that. And it's so easy. Repeat the words over again? And again? They repeat not only the choruses, they repeat the verses too!

PLAYBOY: Can you sing?

JAY-Z: I can sing bad.

PLAYBOY: At the Nets game, you sang whatever song that came on, from Eminem to Whitney Houston. And you knew all the words.

JAY-Z: Yeah, I know a lot of songs. I store them. I'm an iPod. The human iPod.

PLAYBOY: Something else that's new on Blueprint 2—your mistrust of women has softened.

JAY-Z: Right. People already know my paranoia about women. Before I was a rapper who didn't know who his friends were, I was a hustler who didn't know who his friends were. When it's a song about women, it's usually the single, which makes people say, "This guy is dissing women on every fucking record." (Laughs) "Big Pimpin'," "Can I Get a Fuck You," those are the hits. But the slower ones are usually more meaningful and serious.

PLAYBOY: Do you think women are less trustworthy than men?

JAY-Z: No. But guys don't want to date me for my money, so I don't have to worry about them.

PLAYBOY: If you're going to have kids, you have to get over that paranoia.

JAY-Z: Yeah. I'm learning, I'm growing. I'm growing slow.

PLAYBOY: You tell a story in "This Can't Be Life," that you were almost a father. True story?

JAY-Z: Yeah. The girl I was seeing about four years ago had a miscarriage. But I wasn't sad. I didn't even grieve. Maybe it happened because I wasn't ready to be a dad.

PLAYBOY: And now you're dating a woman who doesn't need your money, either.

JAY-Z: Is that right?

PLAYBOY: How did you meet Beyoncé Knowles?

JAY-Z: I used to see her all the time. (Quickly) We're not engaged or anything, by the way. We're just cool. We're just friends. We don't really, ah, know each other like that yet.

PLAYBOY: Just friends, like the way you and Memphis Bleek are just friends?

JAY-Z: No, Beyoncé's a woman. A very attractive woman. But we're friends for now. Me and Bleek, we're tighter. I took him from the projects—I'm from 5C, he's from 3C. He's been with me since 1994. Between Beyoncé and him? Beyonce's got to go (laughs).

PLAYBOY: Do you wish that she was your girlfriend?

JAY-Z: She's beautiful. Who wouldn't wish she was their girlfriend? Maybe one day (smiles).

PLAYBOY: We're not quite convinced. We know you like to keep parts of your life private. If she were your girlfriend, would you tell us?

JAY-Z: Probably not.

PLAYBOY: Well, you're pretty cool—hard to read at times.

JAY-Z: Thank you, brother. (Raises a glass of Cristal) Toast to that.

PLAYBOY: Does that create problems in relationships?

JAY-Z: Yeah, it could. I'm not the most I love you guy. That's one of my problems. "What, you want me to tell you? Those are just

> "A lot of people look at me like they looked at Martin Luther King. I'm not a saint—I did bad things. I fucked up. I try not to do bad things anymore. I try to be a decent citizen."

words—everyone is going to tell you. Look at what I do." I have to change that.

PLAYBOY: How are you going to change that?

JAY-Z: I know it. That's half the battle.

PLAYBOY: But only half.

JAY-Z: But half? Shit. It was zero before—be happy.

PLAYBOY: If we were going to play amateur psychiatrist—

JAY-Z: That's what this feels like.

PLAYBOY: Here's what we would say: As a kid, you loved your dad. But he left and you felt rejected, and that hurt so much, you don't want to love anyone else the same way.

JAY-Z: Definitely. That could be 100 percent true. There's no worse pain. That's why a lot of things didn't affect me growing up.

PLAYBOY: For instance, you had a fight with your own brother, when you were 12, and shot him. He lived, but it was an intense experience.

JAY-Z: Yeah. (Pause) You know what? Let's not. I'll tell you that one day, you as a person. Does he have to relive it every time someone talks to me about it? Is that fair to him?

PLAYBOY: Where did you get the gun?

JAY-Z: That story's even worse. I was 12. I didn't know better. The person who gave me the gun had to be 20 or 21—you're an adult. Damn, why would you do that? How could you even—I don't understand. But I can't blame nobody but myself.

PLAYBOY: Someone gave you a gun so you could shoot your brother?

JAY-Z: (Pauses) Yeah. Terrible. That's the one thing to this day I regret.

PLAYBOY: Why did you shoot him?

JAY-Z: My brother was a really, really, really tough person to get along with. He was messed up on drugs really bad.

PLAYBOY: Did he forgive you?

JAY-Z: Oh, right away, and that made it worse.

PLAYBOY: Then a few years later, when you were selling drugs, someone shot at you three times on the street.

JAY-Z: It was a little bit farther than me to you.

PLAYBOY: Who shot at you?

JAY-Z: I ain't going into that. I know who it was. He was a friend of mine. It was a misunderstanding. We've talked about it and laughed.

PLAYBOY: On "Dead Presidents II," you talk about being shot at and say it was "divine intervention" you weren't killed. Do you think God protects drug dealers?

JAY-Z: I think God protects anyone with a good heart. People say, "That's a comfort blanket so you can do whatever the fuck you want." But my intention was good. I was in a place where there's no hope. It was like, Fuck, man, I ain't going to continue to live like this. I've got to do something. Then I got addicted to that life. It was fun. It helped my situation, helped everyone around me.

PLAYBOY: So how much money did you make back then?

JAY-Z: I don't know the dollar amount.

PLAYBOY: Two grand a week? Ten grand a week?

JAY-Z: I did well.

PLAYBOY: When you were dealing, did you use drugs?

JAY-Z: No. Never. I'd seen my brother. After my father, that was the next person I looked up to. He had all the girls, he played basketball. Then he was a whole different person.

PLAYBOY: We've heard you only recently started smoking pot.

JAY-Z: (*Laughs*) There would be 10 of us, out in the Hamptons, and we won't finish one joint. "Ooh, we high!" "That's too strong! Put that out!" I don't smoke pot no more.

PLAYBOY: From listening to your songs, people might believe that you're always drinking.

JAY-Z: Cristal at 10 in the morning, right. Although I was drinking champagne and eating caviar this afternoon.

PLAYBOY: Where?

JAY-Z: I went shopping today, at Jacob the Jeweler. Had champagne and Beluga caviar.

PLAYBOY: Were you buying a present for Beyoncé?

JAY-Z: Ha ha. No.

PLAYBOY: Honestly?

JAY-Z: I wouldn't tell you honestly.

PLAYBOY: You frequently mention Cristal in your songs. Are you a connoisseur? Would you know it if you ordered Cristal, and someone brought you—

JAY-Z: Taittinger? Yeah, I would know right away.

PLAYBOY: We heard you have a wrist watch worth so much money, you won't wear it outside your house.

JAY-Z: What kind of silly shit is that? Then why would I buy it? I got a one of one, an Audemars Piguet. There's no other watch like it in the world. It's like a piece of art.

PLAYBOY: How much did it cost?

JAY-Z: A little bit. I'm trying to get grown up and not talk about figures anymore. I'm learning that the big cats don't talk about money, only us ignorant rappers. I have to get sophisticated with my paper. I'm not nouveau money.

PLAYBOY: We should have interviewed you a few years ago, huh?

JAY-Z: I would've gave it to you. You'd have known how much money I have right now. You'd know Roc-A-Fella was $400 million instead of $300 million—I'm not saying it, though.

PLAYBOY: You just did!

JAY-Z: I tried. Old habits are hard to break (laughs). And you got me drinking this goddamn Cristal.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about sex. Which have you done more often, turned down sex or accepted it?

JAY-Z: I think every artist has turned it down more. I hope. Shit (*laughs*). If the place is filled with 20,000 people, 10,000 of them are screaming women. I never got carried away. I have always been a person who's more interested in business first.

PLAYBOY: If there's a beautiful woman on one side of the room, and a business deal on the other—

JAY-Z: I'd take the business deal. Sorry. I know people will be like, "You fucking asshole! You dummy!"

PLAYBOY: You rapped with Eminem and DMX and Biggie, all of

> "'I'm from the hood.' It's a joke. You can't take that seriously. Rappers, we ain't from the hood. We got nice homes and nice cars. We from the mansion."

whom are highly respected. You also rapped with Puff Daddy and Ja Rule, who aren't respected. Does it make a difference to you who you rap with?

JAY-Z: I rap with people for different reasons. Sometimes I like them, sometimes I respect them. I was on a Juvenile remix because I liked this record he had, called Ha. He did something new. So I called him and said that I would love to do the remix.

PLAYBOY: So why rap with Puffy?

JAY-Z: I respect Puff on a creative level. As a rapper, you ain't got to respect him. As a producer, he gave "Juicy" to Biggie. Biggie didn't want to do it. (The song made Biggie a star.) "That beat is soft. I ain't doing that." As a rapper, I can't say I want to hear him. He's not a rapper.

PLAYBOY: Do you want to follow Puffy into movies?

JAY-Z: I do. I have a bunch of scripts, from Wesley Snipes, Denzel. Chris Rock said, "Boy, you better take these movies. There ain't no telling if you're going to be hot tomorrow."

PLAYBOY: How about female rappers? Years ago, you had Queen Latifah, MC Lyte. Now all the top female rappers—Foxy Brown, Lil' Kim—have to be sexy and trashy, wearing fur bikinis. Why is that?

JAY-Z: Maybe it's because rap is so angry. "Breakin' off on a motherfucker like that!" A girl don't have no street credibility. You don't believe a girl when she's saying, "I'm holding a gat to the motherfucker."

PLAYBOY: Especially if she's wearing a fur bikini when she says it.

JAY-Z: (Laughs) You're like, You can't run fast in those stilettos.

PLAYBOY: Last year you made a record with R. Kelly, Best of Both Worlds. Just before it came out, he was arrested on 21 counts of child pornography, over a videotape that seems to show him having sex with an underage girl. The music video you were going to make was canceled, the tour was canceled, the record didn't sell. Was that your biggest disappointment in music?

JAY-Z: I would say so. I had such high expectations for it. I made the album with somebody I think is the greatest writer of our time. And we didn't finish the story, with the videos and performing.

PLAYBOY: How did you find out about the charges against him?

JAY-Z: People were talking about it before the album. Damn, why didn't nobody tell me? It seems like this was a known fact for a while, and people just started telling me a week before the album dropped. "You didn't know?" Then it finally hit the news.

PLAYBOY: A lot of counts of child pornography. Do you think that Kelly's career is over?

JAY-Z: I have no idea. It's going to be really tough.

PLAYBOY: Do you think that he might be guilty?

JAY-Z: I don't want to speculate, man. I don't know what half of America is doing behind closed doors. When it's an entertainer, it's headline news. It ain't the first time it happened. Look at fucking Elvis, man. How old was Priscilla when he married her? Eleven?

PLAYBOY: And when Kelly married Aaliyah, she was 15. Doesn't that indicate a sexual interest in underage women?

JAY-Z: I miss Aaliyah. I hate that her name is even involved in these kinds of conversations.

PLAYBOY: You've said before that rap is like wrestling. What do you mean?

JAY-Z: When I say that, I'm talking about all the beefs going on. Everybody is from a place where they had nothing. Now they're getting a little bit of something—they're not going to risk that over "I rhyme better than you." All that muscling up, all that sticking out your chest, it's all wrestling. "Come here, boy!" Nobody is gonna do nothing to nobody. It's all just a show.

PLAYBOY: Just hype?

JAY-Z: There you go. A lot of attention to your record.

PLAYBOY: And yet rappers are always saying, "I'm keepin' it real."

JAY-Z: Someone recently told me, "Real is just a foundation for a great fantasy." That's deep.

PLAYBOY: You've had a big battle with Nas—he made a song about you, you made a song about him, back and forth. If it was just wrestling, does that mean you never got mad?

JAY-Z: You get angry, but at the end of the day, I'm not going to do nothing. It just pushes you to make better records. I got mad and went into the studio.

PLAYBOY: Which got you angrier: When he called you ugly or when he implied you're gay?

JAY-Z: Ugly? A guy's not supposed to judge another guy. So that didn't bother me. But there's an imaginary line in the sand, and most people cross it when they are off balance. You don't say things about another guy's genitalia.

PLAYBOY: He said that you should suck his dick.

JAY-Z: Yeah. You can't say that to a man. It's like when you have nothing else to grab on to and you say, "Fuck you! Your mother!" I take comfort from that. I dropped some heavy records, and he was a little off balance.

PLAYBOY: You offered to settle the fight in a boxing ring. Was

there ever a chance that would happen?

JAY-Z: No, too much to lose. Especially in rap. People get knocked out, they lose that image. When you're listening to a record, "I'm the illest!" I don't know, man, I just saw you get knocked out (laughs). I hear what you're saying, but my eyes are seeing something different. I would have boxed him.

PLAYBOY: How do you know you would have won?

JAY-Z: My will. My will alone. I'm too strong, man.

PLAYBOY: Blueprint 2 is a double album. What's next, a triple album?

JAY-Z: Never. That was too much music. Eminem said, "Yo, I love the album, man. I ain't finished listening to it. But I'm gonna get to it."

PLAYBOY: On "The Ruler's Back," you liken yourself to Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks.

JAY-Z: What did I say?

PLAYBOY: We have to tell you? You've written so many songs, you can't remember your own lyrics?

JAY-Z: Word up. Friends have to tell me my rhymes all the time.

PLAYBOY: "I'm representing…."

JAY-Z: "I'm representin' for the seat where Rosa Parks sat/Where Malcolm X was shot, where Martin Luther was popped." Yeah, I believe that every black person has a responsibility. When you do good, everyone is looking at you—every black person. So you're the same person as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King and Malcolm X. I'm not just representing the hood and Roc-A-Fella Records, I'm representing for the whole culture. A lot of people look at me like they looked at Martin Luther King.

PLAYBOY: Some people might say, "What's a rapper who used to deal drugs doing comparing himself to Dr. King?"

JAY-Z: I'm not like a politician who says he never did nothing wrong. I'm not a saint—I did bad things. I fucked up. But I'm a very legit person. I try not to do bad things anymore. I try to be a decent citizen.

PLAYBOY: But you're not always so levelheaded and orderly. In December 1999 you were arrested for stabbing Lance "Un" Rivera in a nightclub and pleaded guilty to misdemeanor assault. What happened that night?

JAY-Z: A fight got out of hand.

PLAYBOY: The rumor was, you were mad because he was bootlegging your music.

JAY-Z: That doesn't make sense. My stuff gets bootlegged every year. It had nothing to do with bootlegging.

PLAYBOY: If the story's been told wrong, set the record straight.

JAY-Z: No. There's a lot of stories being told wrong. I can't correct every story. Me and Un, we talk—we're not cool, but we're not mad.

PLAYBOY: Why did you have a knife on you that night?

JAY-Z: I don't want to talk about the knives. Just leave that one alone.

PLAYBOY: Let's put it this way: At any given time, do you have protection on you?

JAY-Z: No. One time I heard Russell Simmons say, "I don't even want to see a gun. I don't want no friends with guns." I was like, He's crazy. But now I feel the same way. What's wrong with me? I'm a gangsta rapper. (Makes a mean face) From the hood.

PLAYBOY: But a few months after the stabbing, you were arrested again because your bodyguard was found with an unlicensed Glock semiautomatic.

JAY-Z: I'm seldom with a bodyguard. I like to go and come as I please. I go to games by myself all the time. But if I'm going to be in a partylike atmosphere, where there's a bunch of people? Yeah, definitely, 100 percent. Like Michael Jackson or Britney Spears would.

PLAYBOY: If he had the gun, why were you charged? I don't understand.

JAY-Z: Me, neither. I didn't have a gun. I was in a limousine with a partition. The partition was up. I don't know what's going on in the front. But I'm thinking, All right, he's going to straighten it out. I was joking around with the cop. I was laughing. Then the cop was like, Turn around, put your hands behind your back. I wasn't laughing no more. They said they charged me because it was my car. Took my fingerprints and a picture. I understood it later. It was just for the media. The DA has a publicist who came down to the station house. That was all about imaging.

PLAYBOY: From your first album to the last, you use the word fag a lot. Are you homophobic?

JAY-Z: Um, I think rap is homophobic. I don't know. I could be. My friends and I play a game called Pause—if you say something that sounds gay, like, "I was with the dude the other day," you have to say, "Pause." That could be viewed as homophobic. I stopped playing Pause this year—I'm too grown. So maybe I'm getting better.

PLAYBOY: But not playing Pause doesn't mean you're no longer homophobic.

JAY-Z: I mean, it's a start, man. Shit. Goddamn (laughs).

PLAYBOY: Could there ever be a successful gay rapper?

JAY-Z: That would be extremely tough. Rap is all, "Pickin' off a motherfucker like that. (Makes a mean face) I'm from the hood."

PLAYBOY: Every time you say, "I'm from the hood," you screw up your face like a cartoon villain.

JAY-Z: Because it's funny. "I'm from the hood." It's a joke. You can't take that seriously. Rappers, we ain't from the hood. We got nice homes and nice cars. We from the mansion.

Kate

JADE
MARRIOTT

My Name is Jade Marriott, I'm 27 and from the UK. I have travelled to many different countries and cities as I used to be an air hostess! Travel is a big passion of mine; I love to learn about different cultures and traditions. I'm very girly and love anything associated with pampering! My dream is one day to live abroad again somewhere nice and hot, and set up a shelter or charity for neglected animals and have lots of furry friends that I can take care of.

Such an honour to have a gorgeous and talented beauty feature! We're curious to know how your journey has been as one of the most respected models in your industry. My Journey in this Industry has been interesting, it has definitely broadened my horizons and changed my outlook on a lot of different things, however I have loved my years of modelling!

Given your obvious stunning good looks and striking features, tell us a bit about where you're from? I am from England, not far from Nottingham Robin Hoods County!

Tell us something surprising about you? I use to enjoy classical singing, I actually have a certificate from The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music

2020 was an incredibly challenging for all us, what would say has been the most challenging thing for you thus far? The most challenging part of 2020 was not being able to socialise and see all of my family and friends.

What are some of the things you like to do, behind the cameras and all the glitz and glamour? I love cooking, sometimes I spend hours in my kitchen perfecting recipes. I also love being fit and healthy and working out either at the gym or at home

If we were to try and sweep you right off your feet, what are some of the things you look for in an ideal partner? I would look for somebody who I really connect with and enjoy the same things, someone who can make me laugh but who's also not arrogant! And he has to be a classic gentleman

And what would make you go running in the opposite direction as fast as possible? If they were inconsiderate and controlling, compromising is essential in a relationship

You're a seemingly talented lady, what are some, if any, of your hidden talents not many people know about? I used to do gymnastics when I was younger, so I am quite flexible and can do the splits still

What makes you feel sexy? Dancing to sexy music, although I'm not the best dancer.. I feel sexy when I am dancing around and listening to some latin music!

If you could have any superpower in the world, what would it be and why? I would be able to teleport myself where ever I wanted, whenever I wanted, so I could go and see friends all over the world without any hassle!

What can we expect from you this year? Any major plans and exciting things we can look forward to from you? I plan to push my modeling career, and getting my name out there more so hopefully you will be seeing a lot more of me.

It has been a true pleasure getting to know you! Any final words for our readers out there? Don't hold back from chasing your dreams, you will never know if you don't try! and I hope you all have a healthy and happy 2021

Kate

Martin Luther King Jr.:

A Testament of Hope

In his final pub ished statement, the fa len civil rights leader points the way out of America's racial turmoil into the promised and of true equality

WR TTEN BY
ZOË LIGON

In January of 1969 PLAYBOY published a piece that would come to stand the test of time Martin Luther King, Jr.'s essay A Testament of Hope, which King wrote prior to his murder in the spring of 1968. The urgent statement, wrote editors at the time, "implores white America to rectify the evils of racial inequality and economic segrega t.on and points the way to m'the promised land' of equal justice." The text, which is accompanied by a now iconic illustration by Shelly Canton, has since become one of the world's most powerful writings on nonviolence, policy, Black nationalism and humanity itself

In the piece, King asked readers to consider, p"Why is the issue of equality still so far from solution in America, a nation that professes itself to be democratic, inventive, hospitable to new ideas, rich, productive and awesomely powerful?"

Fifty one years later, King's question remains unanswered The revolutionary's vision for an equitable society continues to guide us forward as we grapp.e with police brutality, racism, violence and hatred in America, and in the world There is simply no better t.me to revis.t this landmark com position than now, when we are potentially at the precipice of meaningful change once again. May we continue to p"fight for human justice, brotherhood, secure peace and abundance for all," as Dr King implored us to do

Whenever I am asked my opinion of the current state of the civil rights movement, I am forced to pause, it is not easy to describe a crisis so profound that it has caused the most powerful nation in the world to stag ger in confusion and bewilderment. Today's problems are so acute because the tragic evasions and defaults of several centuries have accumulated to disaster proportions The luxury of a leisurely approach to urgent solutions the ease of gradualism was forfeited by ignoring the issues for too long The nation waited until the black man was explosive with fury before stirring itself even to partial concern. Confronted now with the interrelated problems of war, infla tion, urban decay, white backlash and a climate of violence, it is now forced to address itself to race relations and poverty, and it is tragically unprepared. What might once have been a series of separate problems now merge into a social crisis of almost stupefy ing complexity.

I am not sad that black Americans are re belling, this was not only inevitable but eminently desirable Without this magnificent ferment among Negroes, the old evasions and procrastinations would have continued indefinitely Black men have slammed the door shut on a past of deadening passivity Except for the Reconstruction years, they have never in their long history on Ameri can soil struggled with such creativity and courage for their freedom These are our bright years of emergence, though they are painful ones, they cannot be avoided

Yet despite the widening of our stride, history is racing forward so rapidly that the Negro's inherited and imposed disad vantages slow him down to an infuriating crawl Lack of education, the dislocations of recent urbanization and the hardening of white resistance loom as such tormenting roadblocks that the goal sometimes appears not as a fixed point in the future but as a receding point never to be reached Still, when doubts emerge, we can remember that only yesterday Negroes were not only grossly exploited but negated as human be ings. They were invisible in their misery But the sullen and silent slave of 110 years ago, an object of scorn at worst or of pity at best, is today's angry man. He is vibrantly on the move; he is forcing change, rather than waiting for it in pathetic futility In less than two decades, he has roared out of slumber to change so many of his life's conditions that he may yet find the means to accelerate his march forward and overtake the racing locomotive of history

These words may have an unexpectedly optimistic ring at a time when pessimism is the prevail.ng mood. People are often sur prised to learn that I am an optimist. They know how often I have been jailed, how frequently the days and nights have been filled with frustration and sorrow, how bit ter and dangerous are my adversaries They expect these experiences to harden me into a grim and desperate man They fail, however, to perceive the sense of affirmation generated by the challenge of embracing

NEGROES HAVE A_WAYS HELD THE HOPE THAT F THEY RE ALLY DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY ARE GREAT SOLDIERS AND F THEY REALLY F GHT FOR AMER CA AND HE_P SAVE AMER CAN DEMOCRACY, THEN WHEN THEY COME BACK HOME, AMER CA W LL TREAT THEM BETTER TH S HAS NOT BEEN THE CASE

struggle and surmounting obstacles. They have no comprehension of the strength that comes from faith in God and man. It is possible for me to falter, but I am profoundly secure in my knowledge that God loves us, he has not worked out a design for our failure. Man has the capacity to do right as well as wrong, and his history is a path upward, not downward. The past is strewn with the ruins of the empires of tyranny, and each is a monument not merely to man's blunders but to his capacity to overcome them. While it is a bitter fact that in America in 1968, I am denied equality solely because I am black, yet I am not a chattel slave. Millions of people have fought thousands of battles to enlarge my freedom; restricted as it still is, progress has been made. This is why I remain an optimist, though I am also a realist, about the barriers before us. Why is the issue of equality still so far from solution in America, a nation that professes itself to be democratic, inventive, hospitable to new ideas, rich, productive and awesomely powerful? The problem is so tenacious because, despite its virtues and attributes, America is deeply racist and its democracy is flawed both economically and socially. All too many Americans believe justice will unfold painlessly or that its absence for black people will be tolerated tranquilly.

Justice for black people will not flow into society merely from court decisions nor from fountains of political oratory. Nor will a few token changes quell all the tempestuous yearnings of millions of disadvantaged black people. White America must recognize that justice for black people cannot be achieved without radical changes in the structure of our society. The comfortable, the entrenched, the privileged cannot continue to tremble at the prospect of change in the status quo.

Stephen Vincent Benet had a message for both white and black Americans in the title of a story, Freedom Is a Hard Bought Thing. When millions of people have been cheated for centuries, restitution is a costly process. Inferior education, poor housing, unemployment, inadequate health care—each is a bitter component of the oppression that has been our heritage. Each will require billions of dollars to correct. Justice so long deferred has accumulated interest and its cost for this society will be substantial in financial as well as human terms. This fact has not been fully grasped, because most of the gains of the past decade were obtained at bargain rates. The desegregation of public facilities cost nothing, neither did the election and appointment of a few black public officials.

The price of progress would have been high enough at the best of times, but we are in an agonizing national crisis because a complex of profound problems has intersected in an explosive mixture. The black surge toward freedom has raised justifiable demands for racial justice in our major cities at a time when all the problems of city life have simultaneously erupted. Schools, transportation, water supply, traffic and crime would have been municipal agonies whether or not Negroes lived in our cities. The anarchy of unplanned city growth was destined to confound our confidence. What is unique to this period is our inability to arrange an order of priorities that promises solutions that are decent and just.

Millions of Americans are coming to see that we are fighting an immoral war that costs nearly 30 billion dollars a year, that we are perpetuating racism, that we are tolerating almost 40 million poor during an overflowing material abundance. Yet they remain helpless to end the war, to feed the hungry, to make brotherhood a reality, this has to shake our faith in ourselves. If we look honestly at the realities of our national life, it is clear that we are not marching forward, we are groping and stumbling; we are divided and confused. Our moral values and our spiritual confidence sink, even as our material wealth ascends. In these trying circumstances, the black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws—racism, poverty, militarism and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society. It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced.

It is time that we stopped our blithe lip service to the guarantees of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. These fine sentiments are embodied in the Declaration of Independence, but that document was always a declaration of intent rather than of reality. There were slaves when it was written, there were still slaves when it was adopted, and to this day, black Americans have not life, liberty nor the privilege of pursuing happiness, and millions of poor white Americans are in economic bondage that is scarcely less oppressive. Americans who genuinely treasure our national ideals, who know they are still elusive dreams for all too many, should welcome the stirring of Negro demands. They are shattering the complacency that allowed a multitude of social evils to accumulate. Negro agitation is requiring America to reexamine its comforting myths and may yet catalyze the drastic reforms that will save us from social catastrophe.

In indicting white America for its ingrained and tenacious racism, I am using the term "white" to describe the majority, not all who are white. We have found that there are many white people who clearly perceive the justice of the Negro struggle for human dignity. Many of them joined our struggle and displayed heroism no less inspiring than that of black people. More than a few died by our side, their memories are cherished and are undimmed by time.

Yet the largest part of white America is still poisoned by racism, which is as native to our soil as pine trees, sagebrush and buffalo grass. Equally native to us is the concept that gross exploitation of the Negro is acceptable, if not commendable. Many whites who concede that Negroes should

“Police must cease being occupation troops in the ghetto and start protecting its residents.”

> **An insistent question defies evasion: Is security for some being purchased at the price of degradation for others?"**

have equal access to public facilities and the untrammeled right to vote cannot understand that we do not intend to remain in the basement of the economic structure; they cannot understand why a porter or a housemaid would dare dream of a day when his work will be more useful, more remunerative and a pathway to rising opportunity. This incomprehension is a heavy burden in our efforts to win white allies for the long struggle.

But the American Negro has in his nature the spiritual and worldly fortitude to eventually win his struggle for justice and freedom. It is a moral fortitude that has been forged by centuries of oppression. In their sorrow and their hardship, Negroes have become almost instinctively cohesive. We band together readily, and against white hostility, we have an intense and wholesome loyalty to one another. But we cannot win our struggle for justice all alone, nor do I think that most Negroes want to exclude well intentioned whites from participation in the black revolution. I believe there is an important place in our struggle for white liberals and I hope that their present estrangement from our movement is only temporary. But many white people in the past joined our movement with a kind of messianic faith that they were going to save the Negro and solve all of his problems very quickly. They tended, in some instances, to be rather aggressive and insensitive to the opinions and abilities of the black people with whom they were working, this has been especially true of students. In many cases, they simply did not know how to work in a supporting, secondary role. I think this problem became most evident when young men and women from elite Northern universities came down to Mississippi to work with the black students at Tougaloo and Rust colleges, who were not quite as articulate, didn't type quite as fast and were not as sophisticated. Inevitably, feeling of white paternalism and black inferiority became exaggerated. The Negroes who rebelled against white liberals were trying to assert their own equality and to cast off the mantle of paternalism.

Fortunately, we haven't had this problem in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Most of the white people who were working with us in 1962 and 1963 are still with us. We have always enjoyed a relationship of mutual respect. But I think a great many white liberals outside S C L C also have learned this basic lesson in human relations, thanks largely to Jimmy Baldwin and others who have articulated some of the problems of being black in a multiracial society. And I am happy to report that relationships between whites and Negroes in the human rights movement are now on a much healthier basis.

In society at large, abrasion between the races is far more evident - but the hostility was always there. Relations today are different only in the sense that Negroes are expressing the feelings that were so long muted. The constructive achievements of the decade 1955 to 1965 deceived us. Everyone underestimated the amount of violence and rage Negroes were suppressing and the vast amount of bigotry the white majority was disguising. All black organizations are a reflection of that alienation—but they are only a contemporary way station on the road to freedom. They are a product of this period of identity crisis and directionless confusion. As the human rights movement becomes more confident and aggressive, more nonviolently active, many of these emotional and intellectual problems will be resolved in the heat of battle, and we will not ask what is our neighbor's color but whether he is a brother in the pursuit of racial justice. For much of the fervent idealism of the white liberals has been supplemented recently by a dispassionate recognition of some of the cold realities of the struggle for that justice.

One of the most basic of these realities was pointed out by the President's Riot Commission, which observed that the nature of the American economy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries made it possible for the European immigrants of that time to escape from poverty. It was an economy that had room for—even a great need for—unskilled manual labor. Jobs were available for willing workers, even those with the educational and language liabilities they had brought with them. But the American economy today is radically different. There are fewer and fewer jobs for the culturally and educationally deprived, thus does present-day poverty feed upon and perpetuate itself. The Negro today cannot escape from his ghetto in the way that Irish, Italian, Jewish and Polish immigrants escaped from their ghettos 50 years ago. New methods of escape must be found. And one of these roads to escape will be a more equitable sharing of political power between Negroes and whites. Integration is meaningless without the sharing of power. When I speak of integration, I don't mean a romantic mixing of colors, I mean a real sharing of power and responsibility. We will eventually achieve this, but it is going to be much more difficult for us than for any other minority. After all, no other minority has been so constantly, brutally and deliberately exploited. But because of this very exploitation, Negroes bring a special spiritual and moral contribution to American life—a contribution without which America could not survive.

The implications of true racial integration are more than just national in scope. I don't believe we can have world peace until America has an p"integrated" foreign policy. Our disastrous experiences in Vietnam and the Dominican Republic have been, in one sense, a result of racist deci

sion making. Men of the white west, whether or not they like it, have grown up in a racist culture, and their thinking is colored by that fact. They have been fed on a false mythology and tradition that blinds them to the aspirations and talents of other men. They don't really respect anyone who is not white. But we simply cannot have peace in the world without mutual respect. I honestly feel that a man without racial blinders—or, even better, a man with personal experience of racial discrimination—would be in a much better position to make policy decisions and to conduct negotiations with the underprivileged and emerging nations of the world (or even with Castro, for that matter) than would an Eisenhower or a Dulles.

The American Marines might not even have been needed in Santo Domingo, had the American ambassador there been a man who was sensitive to the color dynamics that pervade the national life of the Dominican Republic. Black men in positions of power in the business world would not be so unconscionable as to trade or traffic with the Union of South Africa, nor would they be so insensitive to the problems and needs of Latin America that they would continue the patterns of American exploitation that now prevail there. When we replace the rabidly segregationist chairman of the Armed Services Committee with a man of good will, when our ambassadors reflect a creative and wholesome interracial background, rather than a cultural heritage that is a conglomeration of Texas and Georgia politics, then we will be able to bring about a qualitative difference in the nature of American foreign policy. This is what we mean when we talk about redeeming the soul of America. Let me make it clear that I don't think white men have a monopoly on sin or greed. But I think there has been a kind of collective experience—a kind of shared misery in the black community—that makes it a little harder for us to exploit other people.

I have come to hope that American Negroes can be a bridge between white civilization and the nonwhite nations of the world, because we have roots in both. Spiritually, Negroes identify understandably with Africa, an identification that is rooted largely in our color; but all of us are a part of the white American world too. Our education has been Western and our language, our attitudes—though we sometimes tend to deny it—are very much influenced by Western civilization. Even our emotional life has been disciplined and sometimes stifled and inhibited by an essentially European upbringing. So, although in one sense we are neither, in another sense we are both Americans and Africans. Our very bloodlines are a mixture. I hope and feel that out of the universality of our experience, we can help make peace and harmony in this world more possible.

Although American Negroes could, if they were in decision making positions, give aid and encouragement to the underprivileged and disenfranchised people in other lands, I don't think it can work the other way around. I don't think the nonwhites in other parts of the world can really be of any concrete help to us, given their own problems of development and self determination. In fact, American Negroes have greater collective buying power than Canada, greater than all four of the Scandinavian countries combined. American Negroes have greater economic potential than most of the nations—perhaps even more than all of the nations—of Africa. We don't need to look for help from some power outside the boundaries of our country, except in the sense of sympathy and identification. Our challenge, rather, is to organize the power we already have in our midst. The Newark riots, for example, could certainly have been prevented by a more aggressive political involvement on the part of that city's Negroes. There is utterly no reason Addonizio should be the mayor of Newark, with the Negro majority that exists in that city. Gary, Indiana, is another tinderbox city, but its black mayor, Richard Hatcher, has given Negroes a new faith in the effectiveness of the political process.

One of the most basic weapons in the fight for social justice will be the cumulative political power of the Negro. I can foresee the Negro vote becoming consistently the decisive vote in national elections. It is already decisive in states that have large numbers of electoral votes. Even today, the Negroes in New York City strongly influence how New York State will go in national elections, and the Negroes of Chicago have a similar leverage in Illinois. Negroes are even the decisive balance of power in the elections in Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia. So the party and the candidate that get the support of the Negro voter in national elections have a very definite edge, and we intend to use this fact to win advances in the struggle for human rights. I have every confidence that the black vote will ultimately help unseat the diehard opponents of equal rights in Congress—who are, incidentally, reactionary on all issues. But the Negro community cannot win this victory alone, indeed, it would be an empty victory even if the Negroes could win it alone. Intelligent men of good will everywhere must see this as their task and contribute to its support.

The election of Negro mayors, such as Hatcher, in some of the nation's larger cities has also had a tremendous psychological impact upon the Negro. It has shown him that he has the potential to participate in the determination of his own destiny—and that of society. We will see more Negro mayors in major cities in the next 10 years, but this is not the ultimate answer. Mayors are relatively impotent figures in the scheme of national politics. Even a white mayor such as John Lindsay of New York simply does not have the money and resources to deal with the problems of his city. The necessary money to deal with urban problems must come from the federal government, and this money is ultimately controlled by the Congress of the United States. The success of these enlightened mayors is entirely dependent upon the financial support made available by Washington.

The past record of the federal government, however, has not been encouraging. No president has really done very much for the American Negro, though the past two presidents have received much undeserved credit for helping us. This credit has accrued to Lyndon Johnson and John Kennedy only because it was during their administrations that Negroes began doing more for themselves. Kennedy didn't voluntarily submit a civil rights bill, nor did Lyndon Johnson. In fact, both told us at one time that such legislation was impossible. President Johnson did

"Millions of black protesting voices have become a sound of distant thunder increasing in volume with the gathering of storm clouds."

respond realistically to the signs of the times and used his skills as a legislator to get bills through Congress that other men might not have gotten through. I must point out, in all honesty, however, that President Johnson has not been nearly so diligent in implementing the bills he has helped shepherd through Congress.

Of the 10 titles of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, probably only the one concerning public accommodations—the most bitterly contested section—has been meaningfully enforced and implemented. Most of the other sections have been deliberately ignored. The same is true of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which provides for federal referees to monitor the registration of voters in counties where Negroes have systematically been denied the right to vote. Yet of the some 900 counties that are eligible for federal referees, only 58 counties to date have had them. The 842 other counties remain essentially just as they were before the march on Selma. Look at the pattern of federal referees in Mississippi, for example. They are dispersed in a manner that gives the appearance of change without any real prospect of actually shifting political power or giving Negroes a genuine opportunity to be represented in the government of their state. There is a similar pattern in Alabama, even though that state is currently at odds with the Democratic administration in Washington because of George Wallace. Georgia, until just recently, had no federal referees at all, not even in the hard-core black-belt counties. I think it is significant that there are no federal referees at all in the home districts of the most powerful Southern senators—particularly Senators Russell, Eastland and Talmadge. The power and moral corruption of these senators remain unchallenged, despite the weapon for change the legislation promised to be. Reform was thwarted when the legislation was inadequately enforced.

But not all is bad in the South, by any means. Though the fruits of our struggle have sometimes been nothing more than bitter despair, I must admit there have been some hopeful signs, some meaningful successes. One of the most hopeful of these changes is the attitude of the Southern Negro himself. Benign acceptance of second-class citizenship has been displaced by vigorous demands for full citizenship rights and opportunities. In fact, most of our concrete accomplishments have been limited largely to the South. We have put an end to racial segregation in the South, we have brought about the beginnings of reform in the political system; and, as incongruous as it may seem, a Negro is probably safer in most Southern cities than he is in the cities of the North. We have confronted the racist policemen of the South and demanded reforms in the police departments. We have confronted the Southern racist power structure and we have elected Negro and liberal white candidates through much of the South in the past 10 years. George Wallace is certainly an exception, and Lester Maddox is a sociological fossil. But despite these anachronisms, at the city and county level, there is a new respect for black votes and black citizenship that just did not exist 10 years ago. Though school integration has moved at a depressingly slow rate in the South, it has moved. Of far more significance is the fact that we have learned that the integration of schools does not necessarily solve the inadequacy of schools. White schools are often just about as bad as black schools, and integrated schools sometimes tend to merge the problems of the two without solving either of them.

There is progress in the South, however—progress expressed by the presence of Negroes in the Georgia House of Representatives, in the election of a Negro to the Mississippi House of Representatives, in the election of a black sheriff in Tuskegee, Alabama, and, most especially, in the integration of police forces throughout the Southern states. There are now even Negro deputy sheriffs in such black-belt areas as Dallas County, Alabama. Just three years ago, a Negro could be beaten for going into the county courthouse in Dallas County; now Negroes share in running it. So there are some changes. But the changes are basically in the social and political areas; the problems we now face—providing jobs, better housing and better education for the poor throughout the country—will require money for their solution, a fact that makes those solutions all the more difficult.

The need for solutions, meanwhile, becomes more urgent every day, because these problems are far more serious now than they were just a few years ago. Before 1964, things were getting better economically for the Negro; but after that year, things began to take a turn for the worse. In particular, automation began to cut into our jobs very badly, and this snuffed out the few sparks of hope the black people had begun to nurture. As long as there was some measurable and steady economic progress, Negroes were willing and able to press harder and work harder and hope for something better. But when the door began to close on the few avenues of progress, then hopeless despair began to set in.

The fact that most white people do not comprehend this situation which prevails in the North as well as in the South—is due largely to the press, which molds the opinions of the white community. Many whites hasten to congratulate themselves on what little progress we Negroes have made. I'm sure that most whites felt that with the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, all race problems were automatically solved. Because most white people are so far removed from the life of the average Negro, there has been little to challenge this assumption. Yet Negroes continue to live with racism every day. It doesn't matter where we are individually in the scheme of things, how near we may be either to the top or to the bottom of society, the cold facts of racism slap each one of us in the face. A friend of mine is a lawyer, one of the most brilliant young men I know. Were he a white lawyer, I have no doubt that he would be in a $100,000 job with a major corporation or heading his own independent firm. As it is, he makes a mere $20,000 a year. This may seem like a lot of money and, to most of us, it is; but the point is that this young man's background and abilities would, if his skin color were different, entitle him to an income many times that amount.

I don't think there is a single major insurance company that hires Negro lawyers. Even within the agencies of the federal government, most Negro employees are in the lower echelons; only a handful of Negroes in federal employment are in upper-income brackets. This is a situation that cuts across this country's economic spectrum. The Chicago Urban League recently conducted a research project in the Kenwood community on the South Side. They discovered that the average educational grade level of Negroes in that community was 10.6 years and the median income was about $4,200 a year. In nearby Gage Park, the median educational grade level of the whites was 8.6 years, but the median income was $9,600 per year. In fact, the average white high school dropout makes as much as, if not more than, the average Negro college graduate.

Solutions for these problems, urgent as they are, must be constructive and rational. Rioting and violence provide no solutions for economic problems. Much of the justification for rioting has come from the thesis—originally set forth by Franz Fanon—that violence has a certain cleansing effect. Perhaps, in a special psychological sense, he may have had a point. But we have seen a better and more constructive cleansing process in our nonviolent demonstrations. Another theory to justify violent revolution is that rioting enables Negroes to overcome their fear of the white man. But they are just as afraid of the power structure after a riot as before. I remember that was true when our staff went into Rochester, New York, after the riot of 1964. When we discussed the possibility of going down to talk with the police, the people who had been most aggressive in the violence were afraid to talk. They still had a sense of inferiority; and not until they were bolstered by the presence of our staff and given reassurance of their political power and the rightness of their cause and the justness of their grievances were they able

and willing to sit down and talk to the police chief and the city manager about the conditions that had produced the riot

As a matter of fact, I think the aura of paramilitarism among the black militant groups speaks much more of fear than it does of confidence. I know, in my own experience, that I was much more afraid in Montgomery when I had a gun in my house. When I decided that, as a teacher of the philosophy of nonviolence, I couldn't keep a gun, I came face to face with the question of death and I dealt with it. And from that point on, I no longer needed a gun nor have I been afraid. Ultimately, one's sense of manhood must come from within him

The riots in Negro ghettos have been, in one sense, merely another expression of the growing climate of violence in America. When a culture begins to feel threatened by its own inadequacies, the majority of men tend to prop themselves up by artificial means, rather than dig down deep into their spiritual and cultural wellsprings. America seems to have reached this point. Americans as a whole feel threatened by communism on one hand and, on the other, by the rising tide of aspirations among the undeveloped nations. I think most Americans know in their hearts that their country has been terribly wrong in its dealings with other peoples around the world. When Rome began to disintegrate from within, it turned to a strengthening of the military establishment, rather than to a correction of the corruption within the society. We are doing the same thing in this country and the result will probably be the same—unless, and here I admit to a bit of chauvinism, the black man in America can provide a new soul force for all Americans, a new expression of the American dream that need not be realized at the expense of other men around the world, but a dream of opportunity and life that can be shared with the rest of the world.

It seems glaringly obvious to me that the development of a humanitarian means of dealing with some of the social problems of the world—and the correlative revolution in American values that this will entail—is a much better way of protecting ourselves against the threat of violence than the military means we have chosen. On these grounds, I must indict the Johnson administration. It has seemed amazingly devoid of statesmanship, and when creative statesmanship wanes, irrational militarism increases. In this sense, President Kennedy was far more of a statesman than President Johnson. He was a man who was big enough to admit when he was wrong—as he did after the Bay of Pigs incident. But Lyndon Johnson seems to be unable to make this kind of statesmanlike gesture in connection with Vietnam. And I think that this has led, as Senator Fulbright has said, to such a strengthening of the military industrial complex of this country that the president now finds himself almost totally trapped by it. Even at this point, when he can readily summon popular support to end the bombing in Vietnam, he persists. Yet bombs in Vietnam also explode at home, they destroy the hopes and possibilities for a decent America.

In our efforts to dispel this atmosphere of violence in this country, we cannot afford to overlook the root cause of the riots. The President's Riot Commission concluded that most violence-prone Negroes are teenagers or young adults who, almost invariably, are underemployed p"underemployed" means working every day but earning an income below the poverty level) or who are employed in menial jobs. And according to a recent Department of Labor statistical report, 24.8 percent of Negro youth are currently unemployed, a statistic that does not include the drifters who avoid the census takers. Actually, it's my guess that the statistics are very, very conservative in this area. The Bureau of the Census has admitted a 10 percent error in this age group, and the unemployment statistics are based on those who are actually applying for jobs. But it isn't just a lack of work, it's also a lack of meaningful work. In Cleveland, 58 percent of the young men between the ages of 16 and 25 were estimated to be either unemployed or underemployed. This appalling situation is probably 90 percent of the root cause of the Negro riots. A Negro who has finished high school often watches his white classmates go out into the job market and earn $100 a week, while he, because he is black, is expected to work for $40 a week. Hence, there is a tremendous hostility and resentment that only a difference in race keeps him out of an adequate job. This situation is social dynamite. When you add the lack of recreational facilities and adequate job counseling, and the continuation of an aggressively hostile police environment, you have a truly explosive situation. Any night on any street corner in any Negro ghetto of the country, a nervous policeman can start a riot simply by being impolite or by expressing racial prejudice. And white people are sadly unaware how routinely and frequently this occurs

It hardly needs to be said that solutions to these critical problems are overwhelmingly urgent. The President's Riot Commission recommended that funds for summer programs aimed at young Negroes should be increased. New York is already spending more on its special summer programs than on its year round poverty efforts, but these are only tentative and emergency steps toward a truly meaningful and permanent solution. And the negative thinking in this area voiced by many whites does not help the situation. Unfortunately, many white people think that we merely "reward" a rioter by taking positive action to better his situation. What these white people do not realize is that the Negroes who riot have given up on America. When nothing is done to alleviate their plight, this merely confirms the Negroes' conviction that America is a hopelessly decadent society. When something positive is done, however, when constructive action follows a riot, a rioter's despair is allayed and he is forced to reevaluate America and to consider whether some good might eventually come from our society after all. But, I repeat, the recent curative steps that have been taken are, at best, inadequate. The summer poverty programs, like most other government projects, function well in some places and are totally ineffective in others. The difference, in large measure, is one of citizen participation; that is the key to success or failure. In cases such as the Farmers' Marketing Cooperative Association in the black belt of Alabama and the Child Development Group in Mississippi, where the people were really involved in the planning and action of the program, it was one of the best experiences in self help and grass roots initiative. But in places like Chicago, where poverty programs are used strictly as a tool of the political machinery and for dispensing party patronage, the very concept of helping

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America has not yet changed because so many think it need not change, but this is the illusion of the damned."

the poor is defiled and the poverty program becomes just another form of enslavement. I still wouldn't want to do away with it, though, even in Chicago. We must simply fight at both the local and the national levels to gain as much community control as possible over the poverty program.

But there is no single answer to the plight of the American Negro. Conditions and needs vary greatly in different sections of the country. I think that the place to start, however, is in the area of human relations, and especially in the area of community-police relations. This is a sensitive and touchy problem that has rarely been adequately emphasized. Virtually every riot has begun from some police action. If you try to tell the people in most Negro communities that the police are their friends, they just laugh at you. Obviously, something desperately needs to be done to correct this. I have been particularly impressed by the fact that even in the state of Mississippi, where the FBI did a significant training job with the Mississippi police, the police are much more courteous to Negroes than they are in Chicago or New York. Our police forces simply must develop an attitude of courtesy and respect for the ordinary citizen. If we can just stop policemen from using profanity in their encounters with black people, we will have accomplished a lot. In the larger sense, police must cease being occupation troops in the ghetto and start protecting its residents. Yet very few cities have really faced up to this problem and tried to do something about it. It is the most abrasive element in Negro-white relations, but it is the last to be scientifically and objectively appraised.

When you go beyond a relatively simple though serious problem such as police racism, however, you begin to get into all the complexities of the modern American economy. Urban transit systems in most American cities, for example, have become a genuine civil rights issue—and a valid one—because the layout of rapid-transit systems determines the accessibility of jobs to the black community. If transportation systems in American cities could be laid out so as to provide an opportunity for poor people to get meaningful employment, then they could begin to move into the mainstream of American life. A good example of this problem is my home city of Atlanta, where the rapid-transit system has been laid out for the convenience of the white upper-middle-class suburbanites who commute to their jobs downtown. The system has virtually no consideration for connecting the poor people with their jobs. There is only one possible explanation for this situation, and that is the racist blindness of city planners.

The same problems are to be found in the areas of rent supplement and low-income housing. The relevance of these issues to human relations and human rights cannot be overemphasized. The kind of house a man lives in, along with the quality of his employment, determines, to a large degree, the quality of his family life. I have known too many people in my own parish in Atlanta who, because they were living in overcrowded apartments, were constantly bickering with other members of their families—a situation that produced many kinds of severe dysfunctions in family relations. And yet I have seen these same families achieve harmony when they were able to afford a house allowing for a little personal privacy and freedom of movement.

All these human-relations problems are complex and related, and it's very difficult to assign priorities—especially as long as the Vietnam War continues. The Great Society has become a victim of the war. I think there was a sincere desire in this country four or five years ago to move toward a genuinely great society, and I have little doubt that there would have been a gradual increase in federal expenditures in this direction, rather than the gradual decline that has occurred, if the war in Vietnam had been avoided.

One of the incongruities of this situation is the fact that such a large number of the soldiers in the Armed Forces in Vietnam—especially the front-line soldiers who are actually doing the fighting—are Negroes. Negroes have always held the hope that if they really demonstrate that they are great soldiers and if they really fight for America and help save American democracy, then when they come back home, America will treat them better. This has not been the case. Negro soldiers returning from World War One were met with race riots, job discrimination and continuation of the bigotry that they had experienced before. After World War Two, the GI Bill did offer some hope for a better life to those who had the educational background to take advantage of it, and there was proportionately less turmoil. But for the Negro GI, military service still represents a means of escape from the oppressive ghettos of the rural South and the urban North. He often sees the Army as an avenue for educational opportunities and job training. He sees in the military uniform a symbol of dignity that has long been denied him by society. The tragedy in this is that military service is probably the only possible escape for most young Negro men. Many of them go into the Army, risking death, in order that they might have a few of

the human possibilities of life. They know that life in the city ghetto or life in the rural South almost certainly means jail or death or humiliation. And so, by comparison, military service is really the lesser risk.

One young man on our staff, Hosea Williams, returned from the foxholes of Germany a 60 percent disabled veteran. After 13 months in a veterans' hospital, he went back to his home town of Attapulgus, Georgia. On his way home, he went into a bus station at Americus, Georgia, to get a drink of water while waiting for his next bus. And while he stood there on his crutches, drinking from the fountain, he was beaten savagely by white hoodlums. This pathetic incident is all too typical of the treatment received by Negroes in this country—not only physical brutality but brutal discrimination when a Negro tries to buy a house, and brutal violence against the Negro's soul when he finds himself denied a job that he knows he is qualified for.

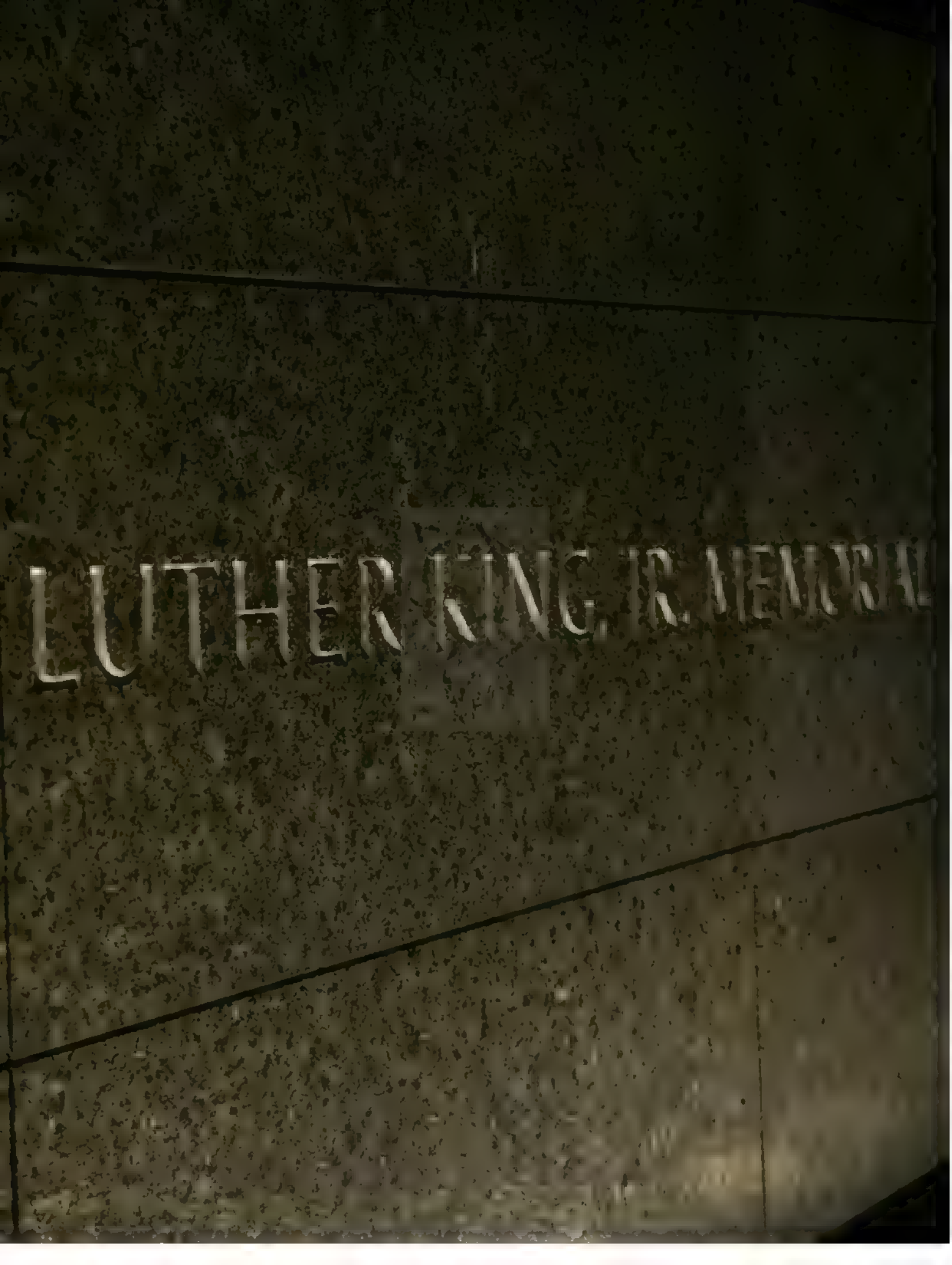
There is also the violence of having to live in a community and pay higher consumer prices for goods or higher rent for equivalent housing than are charged in the white areas of the city. Do you know that a can of beans almost always costs a few cents more in grocery chain stores located in the Negro ghetto than in a store of that same chain located in the upper middle class suburbs, where the median income is five times as high? The Negro knows it, because he works in the white man's house as a cook or a gardener. And what do you think this knowledge does to his soul? How do you think it affects his view of the society he lives in? How can you expect anything but disillusionment and bitterness? The question that now faces us is whether we can turn the Negro's disillusionment and bitterness into hope and faith in the essential goodness of the American system. If we don't, our society will crumble.

It is a paradox that those Negroes who have given up on America are doing more to improve it than are its professional patriots. They are stirring the mass of smug, somnolent citizens, who are neither evil nor good, to an awareness of crisis. The confrontation involves not only their morality but their self interest, and that combination promises to evoke positive action. This is not a nation of venal people. It is a land of individuals who, in the majority, have not cared, who have been heartless about their black neighbors because their ears are blocked and their eyes blinded by the tragic myth that Negroes endure abuse without pain or complaint. Even when protest flared and denied the myth, they were fed new doctrines of inhumanity that argued that Negroes were arrogant, lawless and ungrateful. Habitual white discrimination was transformed into white backlash. But for some, the lies had lost their grip and an internal disquiet grew. Poverty and discrimination were undeniably real; they scarred the nation, they dirtied our honor and diminished our pride. An insistent question defied evasion. Was security for some being purchased at the price of degradation for others? Everything in our traditions said this kind of injustice was the system of the past or of other nations. And yet there it was, abroad in our own land.

Thus was born—particularly in the young generation—a spirit of dissent that ranged from superficial disavowal of the old values to total commitment to wholesale, drastic and immediate social reform. Yet all of it was dissent. Their voice is still a minority, but united with millions of black protesting voices, it has become a sound of distant thunder increasing in volume with the gathering of storm clouds. This dissent is America's hope. It shines in the long tradition of American ideals that began with courageous minutemen in New England, that continued in the Abolitionist movement, that reemerged in the Populist revolt and, decades later, that burst forth to elect Franklin Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. Today's dissenters tell the complacent majority that the time has come when further evasion of social responsibility in a turbulent world will court disaster and death. America has not yet changed because so many think it need not change, but this is the illusion of the damned. America must change because 23 million black citizens will no longer live supinely in a wretched past. They have left the valley of despair; they have found strength in struggle, and whether they live or die, they shall never crawl nor retreat again. Joined by white allies, they will shake the prison walls until they fall. America must change.

A voice out of Bethlehem 2,000 years ago said that all men are equal. It said right would triumph. Jesus of Nazareth wrote no books, he owned no property to endow him with influence. He had no friends in the courts of the powerful. But he changed the course of mankind with only the poor and the despised. Naïve and unsophisticated though we may be, the poor and despised of the 20th century will revolutionize this era. In our "arrogance, lawlessness and ingratitude," we will fight for human justice, brotherhood, secure peace and abundance for all. When we have won these—in a spirit of unshakable nonviolence—then, in luminous splendor, the Christian era will truly begin.

MARTIN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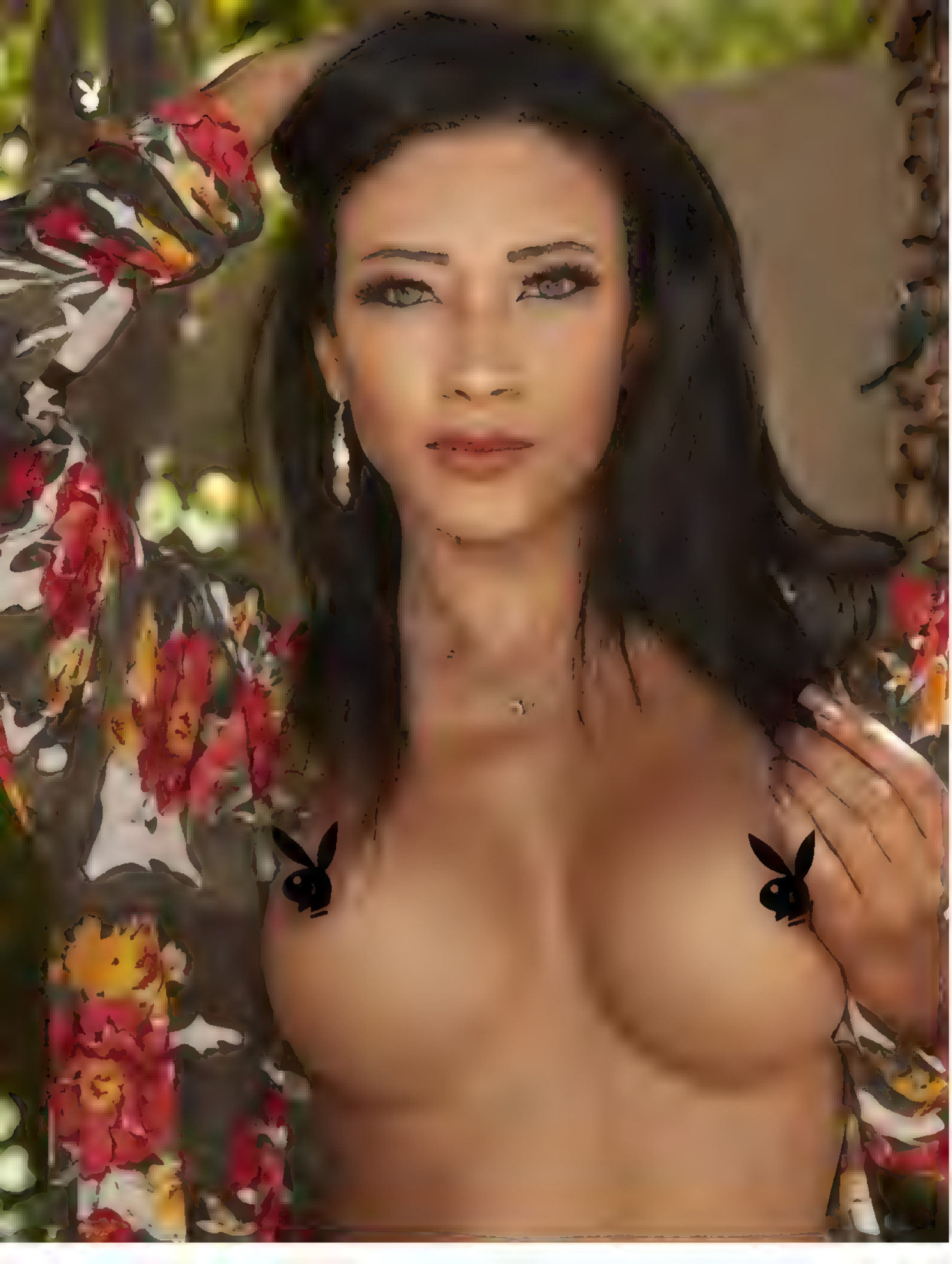
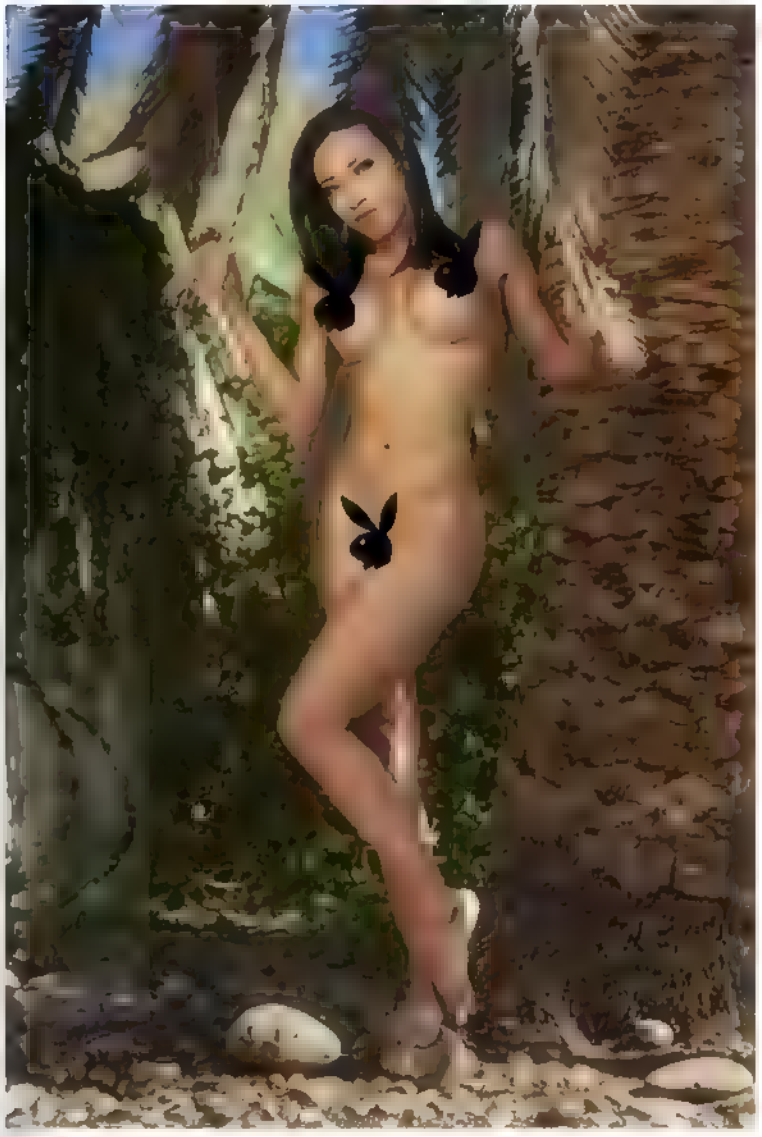


Mazin

Instagram: @i.am.mazin

Photography by Chuck Majors | @yourfavoritephotographerokc

I love life, meeting new people, and expressing myself. I really enjoy sharing aspects of myself that create an emotional impact. I love to make people smile and laugh. I like to leave a lasting impression of myself with people so that the experience will be memorable.



Were you excited to shoot for Playboy? Of course. Appearing in Playboy has always been an important goal for me, since I consider it to be the ultimate in classy erotic entertainment.

Tell us something surprising about you? I love to create my own music mixes to use when I guest DJ at clubs.

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person? I am a perfect little mix of both. I'd say I lean a bit more toward being a city girl but put me in the country and I'll grab my boots. Let's go!

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be? I've always wanted to live in Miami. I have lived in and my whole life so a change to the beach life would be amazing. I love the culture and the fast pace of life in that area. Plus, the water is warm. LOL

What are some of your hobbies? I like to pole dance, cook, mix music and make creative videos for TikTok and other media platforms.

What is your favorite word in any language and what does it mean? My favorite word is the Greek word Murakli. It means to do something with soul, creativity, or love to the point where you leave a piece of yourself in your work. I always like to leave something distinctive and memorable behind. That's how you create a legend.

Name three things on your bucket list? Act in a movie, meet Will Smith, and skydive.

Turn-ons: Attentiveness, loyalty, intelligence, a good cook, and spontaneous actions of love.

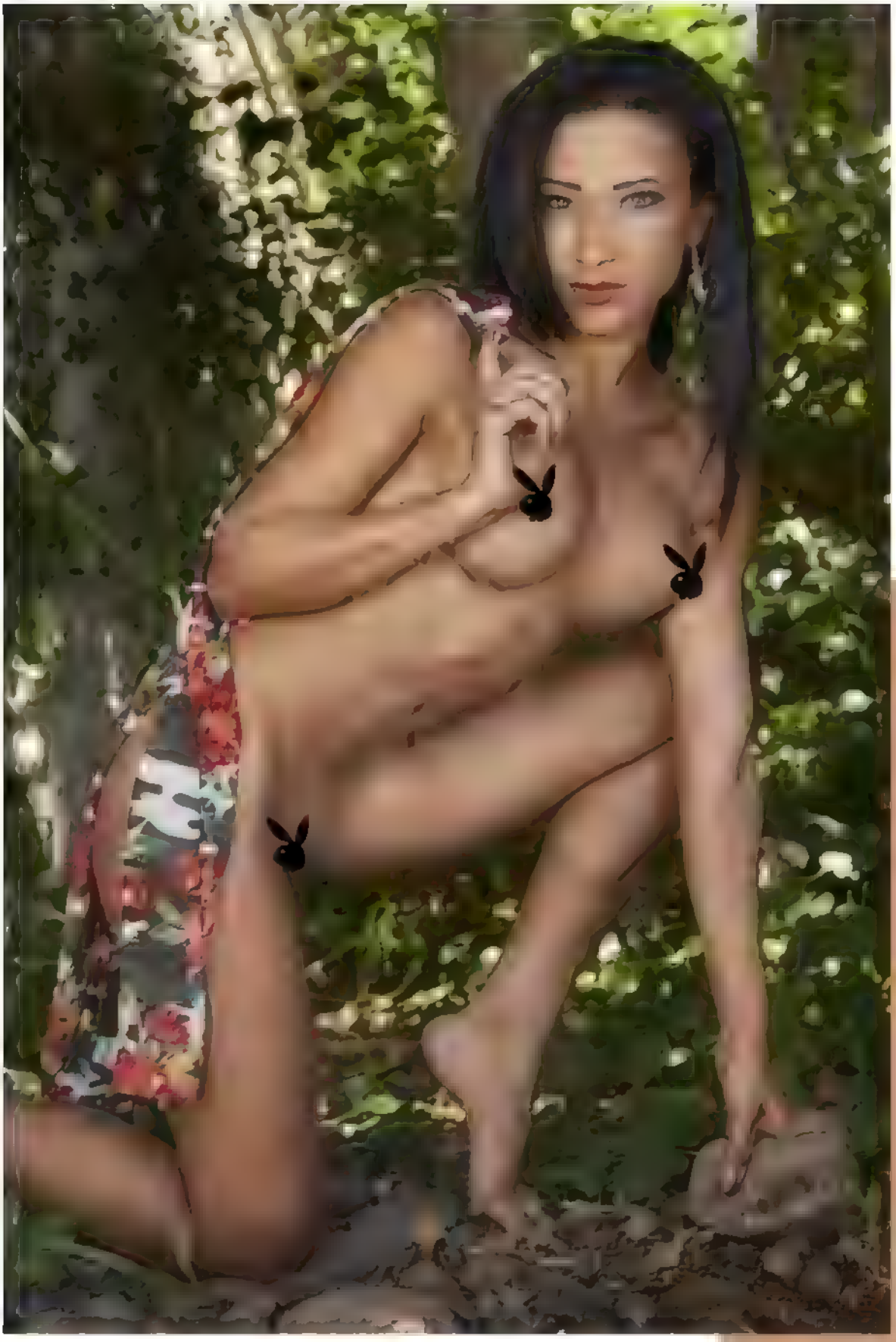
Turn-offs: Dishonesty, rudeness, and if you don't like my cooking "get out my kitchen!" haha

What inspires you? I like to find different ways to express myself. I find inspiration in the performing arts such as music and dance. I also love to travel and to experience the customs and lifestyles of different people.

Describe yourself in three words? Charismatic, determined, and spontaneous

Any last words you would like to share with the readers? I would like to thank you all for given me support in my efforts. I really appreciate the kind words you've shared with me during this journey as they kept me motivated to strive for this goal.

I invite you to accompany on the next steps in my career. To do so please follow me on Twitter, Onlyfans, instagram, Tiktok, other platforms through allmylink.com/iammazin



THE OFFICER & THE INSTIGATOR

HAS THE MEDIA HIGHLIGHTED INSTANCES OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TO DELEGITIMIZE THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT?

It was seven weeks ago that the haunting images of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin kneeling on George Floyd's neck surfaced online, yet the deluge of global anti-police brutality protests persists with unwavering tenacity. The demonstrations personify a collective exasperation at police who have killed enough Black people in the social media era to create a perpetual stream of trending hashtags out of their victims' names.

Organizing in the name of Black lives certainly isn't a novelty; names like Michael Brown, Sandra Bland and Tamir Rice are proof of that. However, a defining characteristic of the latest demonstrations is the mainstream documentation of events, along with the amount of violence meted out by white agitators and police who have participated in strategically fanning the flames of outrage from members of the Black community and its allies.

Lauren Rowello protested in Philadelphia and recounts the unwarrantedly violent crowd maintenance tactics she witnessed from local law enforcement.

"Marchers wanted to continue walking across a main road, but the police would not let anyone pass," Rowello says in an email. "They blocked people marching with bikes, then used those bikes as weapons—shoving them into people and even lifting them to jab them into those who were at the front of the group. Multiple officers hit people with batons and fists, and I got hit in the chaos."

Rowello says the aggression from law enforcement intensified as the protests continued.

"Over the next few days, police met protesters with huge amounts of force each afternoon," she says. "I witnessed (and have footage of) kneeling protesters being met with tear gas and rubber bullets. Legal observers told me that this is the worst police escalation they've ever seen all at once, and that it was unprovoked. Each time tear gas was used, it felt random and used as a way to assert control."

At the inception of the protests, major media networks broadcast hours of live footage of looters and arsonists at work. Presenting only this small portion of the larger story fueled the false narrative that the protests were not respectable forms of resistance, which only served to delegitimize the movement. Meanwhile, various law enforcement agencies have apparently rejected diplomacy in response to attempts to hold them accountable.

In New York City and Richmond, Virginia, footage showed police officers driving their vehicles into crowds of protesters. Buffalo police shoved a 75-year-old nonviolent protester to the ground, leaving him to bleed on the pavement from his fractured skull. Police in Louisville, Kentucky are under investigation in the shooting death of a restaurant owner. Photojournalist Linda Tirado lost vision in her left eye after Minneapolis police allegedly fired a projectile into her face as she set up a shot. Police in Austin, Texas allegedly fired beanbags into the head and abdomen of a pregnant protester who sat on the ground. A 26-year-old Dallas man lost an eye and seven teeth and suffered a facial fracture after police reportedly shot him with less-lethal ammunition during a peaceful protest. U.S. Park Police used tear gas to clear demonstrators from Lafayette Square near the White House to allow for a presidential photo op.

In some cases, protesters reportedly attacked law enforcement, pelting officers with water bottles, bricks, rocks and fireworks. Dallas Police Chief Renee Hall defended her decision to order tear gas deployment in response to protesters assaulting officers with random items and damaging police vehicles.

"I don't think a water bottle being thrown toward an armed squad car warrants the police using tear gas on a crowd," says activist Mercedes Fulbright, a member of the Dallas chapter of Black Youth Project 100 who was among a large group of protesters assaulted with tear gas and threatened with arrest by local law enforcement.

I don't think a water bottle being thrown toward an armed squad car warrants the police using tear gas on a crowd.

Zavala

"Folks have righteous anger. Our communities have been looted, destroyed and stolen from for decades, centuries," she says, emphasizing how civil disobedience forces mainstream America to contend with racial injustices. "A few broken buildings don't make up for the number of Black and brown lives that have been stolen."

Fulbright says the violent tactics only strengthen her perception of law enforcement as a community hazard.

"It didn't change anything," she says. "If anything, it just solidified what I already know: The police don't keep us safe."

Additionally, mysterious white agitators dressed in all black have also taken part in incendiary behavior during the protests. From the man who was recorded breaking windows in a Minneapolis AutoZone to the suspect arrested for setting fire to a police precinct, the accounts are numerous. According to the Daily Beast, Black protesters in Denver, Oakland and Detroit intervened when white protesters attempted to loot, start fires and deface statues.

Sheree Lewis says an orderly protest in Richmond, Virginia eventually resulted in the toppling of a Confederate statue.

"There were definitely agitators there," Lewis says. "They were called upon and knew their roles. These guys were dressed in black long-sleeve shirts, black pants, their masks were black. They weren't regular masks; they were almost like bandannas to cover more of their faces. And it was 93 degrees. So, either you're going to rob us or you're part of the wrecking crew."

Lewis confirmed a police presence near the United Daughters of the Confederacy Memorial Building just off Monument Avenue—a street lined with statues of Confederate figures—but she says they were nowhere near the crowd of protesters.

Tyler D. Parry, a professor of African American and African Diaspora Studies at University of Nevada, Las Vegas, says certain media organizations are complicit in misrepresenting the protests by "selectively" editing protest images.

"Consequently, many will then assume the protests have 'devolved' into anarchy, when the fact is that the vast majority of people are still marching peacefully and trying to maintain order in delivering their message for systemic and systematic change," Parry says via email.

Despite the widespread condemnation of looting and rioting during the ongoing protests, Parry says property destruction isn't exclusive to the latest demonstrations.

"Many Americans assume that the destruction of property is a new phenomenon instituted by Black Lives Matter protestors, when the historical record proves that is not at all the case," he says.

Parry revisits slavery to put the role of property destruction during demonstrations into perspective.

"White slaveholders would never submit to the passive, gradual abolition promoted by white abolitionists in the North," he says. "Enslaved people (and formerly enslaved people) knew that to destroy a racist system, the destruction of property was a prerequisite within a country that allots so much power to individual state governments."

In recent weeks, major media coverage of the protests appears to have dwindled, a pivot that some have linked to the lack of disorderly conduct. The death of Rayshard Brooks—an Atlanta man police fatally shot after the world began to protest police brutality en masse—reignited legitimate concerns that police have zero intent to re-examine their use of violence against protesters or deadly force against Black people.

There are hundreds of thousands of people who understand the need to defund the police, and that is frightening to the very institutions that protect capitalism and white supremacy.

Fulbright offers a sobering prediction about police violence.

"There are hundreds of thousands of people who understand the need to defund the police, and that is frightening to the very institutions that protect capitalism and white supremacy," she says. "Their tactics are going to become more aggressive because they're starting to lose the public's favor."

Nevertheless, she offers a word of encouragement to fellow protesters: "Don't back down. We're winning."

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